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THE 'STRANGER' AS A CHALLENGE FOR COMMUNION ECCLESIOLOGY

Abstract. In this paper, the author deals with the question of communion ecclesiology in the context of the current migration crisis in Europe. Contextual theology based on the correlation method tries to develop the understanding of the Church's essence and mission by using the ecclesiological model called *communion* and putting it in the contemporary social context. The notion of the 'stranger' introduced by the sociologists into the public discourse seems to be very operative and useful category for ecclesiology as well. The first part of the article presents the phenomenon of the stranger in sociological perspective. The second part discusses Jesus as Sacrament of God in the encounter with strangers. The author analyses Jesus' words and his attitude to strangers and socially alienated people. The third part describes the Church as the sacrament of responsibility and open home for strangers and poor people. The Church can be also understood as the mother with a heart open especially to those who suffer from war and misery. In the final part of this paper the author presents some pastoral implications. He draws attention to the necessity to enhance the social aspect of Eucharist and to encourage the believers to create the 'culture of solidarity' with refugees and strangers in need.

Key words: stranger, ecclesiology, communion, the Church, mission, responsibility, solidarity.

Contemporary ecclesiology more often uses the output of social sciences while describing the existential situation of man, to whom the Church would like to preach the liberating message of salvation that comes from God. In a dynamically changing social and cultural landscape, the Church as a community of the faithful runs up against a specific group of people called "strangers." Unfortunately, they are usually treated as impostors who pose a threat to national and religious identity of hitherto relatively stable societies. Social consciousness sees them as dangerous figures who may threaten the existing social order of the totality and question the validity of previously established lines of division. They raise fear for an inevitable and, what is even worse, imposed change of lifestyle led by the "full up."

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Strangers, knocking down seemingly untouchable social canons and proving their relativity and weakness, consequently provoke various emotions and attitudes – from amazement to indifference, to open aggression. Under the circumstances, the Church, understood as a living community of faith and salvation (*communio fidei et salutis*) cannot remain “neutral” about strangers, whom she encounters on the paths of her service. The indifference of the Church to the lot of socially alienated people would express a great sin of negligence, of shirking Christian responsibility and, as a result, denying her communal essence.

For this reason, communion ecclesiology, which is sensitive to the contemporary “sings of the times” ought to reflect on the salvific mission of the Church more profoundly in the context of the escalating phenomena of social alienation. The goal of this article is to present strangers not only as a social class, whose presence in the theoretical reflection of the Church proves its validity, but also as a pressing challenge for ecclesial orthopraxy that confirms the sincerity of the truth about evangelical love of the neighbour, which the Church proclaims. In order to achieve it, we shall present the phenomenon of the stranger and the possible social reactions to his presence. Subsequently, we shall point out the epiphanic dimension of the people called strangers and show selected elements of communion ecclesiology, which seems to be an adequate answer to the sense of “alienated loneliness” that they experience. The final part of the article will be devoted to pastoral conclusions.

1. THE PHENOMENON OF THE “STRANGER”

Although the social division between “we” and “they” is rational, because it enables us to define our identity in relation to another group whose members, making up a totality, do not belong to us, the classification of people based on traditional social categories causes a number of problems. Since they have experienced a lot of suffering, struggle, remorse, or death of the family, some perceive them as a borderline phenomenon *par excellence*.¹ Strangers do not agree with determining the limitations, separation and contradictions, striving for a change of set of norms, which is treated as temporary, conven-

¹ Cf. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Podstawowe motywy fenomenologii obcego* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2009), 9.

tional and relative. As a sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman, has rightly pointed out, that the stranger (*der Fremder*) should not be identified with the unknown person, whom we have no information about and we have never met before. On the contrary, strangers are characterised by the fact that they are to a degree known to people on the grounds of the mere fact of their appearance within their fields of vision and operation. They are subjects who consciously, with no intention of staying but for a moment, enter a world in which autochthons have lived for a long time. Their very presence on a foreign terrain brings about the sense of irritation, uncertainty and anxiety of those we are unable to find the proper mode of coexistence with people perceived as unpredictable, as far as their plans and actions are concerned. This generates problems of the classification of strangers, who cannot be counted as either friends or foes. Blurring this important line of division causes problems with the choice of an attitude toward strangers we are unable to sort into either group. Thus, people become doubtful whether in the face of strange newcomers, they should be affably cooperative or suspiciously and hostilely reserved.²

Even though strangers are, by definition, not evil, their presence on the beaten tracks of our operations triggers the sense of anger, aversion and resistance to them being the supposed cause of the destruction of the order, aesthetics and balance of the jigsaw of our lives we have designed. Strangers gradually become the source of various fears of autochthons, who start to panic because of their ethnic, cultural and religious difference. The fear enhances and solidifies the conviction that strangers are particularly dangerous, because, having once overcome the supposedly insurmountable boundaries of social divisions, they acquire a mysterious power and superhuman cleverness which, mixed with bad intentions, may do great harm to the people who have so far lived in a homogenous environment.³ Deep mistrust of strangers arises, oftentimes combined with the intention of sending them back to where they have come from. Newcomers are the source of fear among stabilised dwellers of a given region also due to the fact that they awkwardly question previous norms, undermining their rationality, inviolability and sense. They frequently attempt to interpret a new social world according to their own criteria, cognitive schemata and modes of thinking. They force autochthons to seek and form credible arguments that would

² Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Socjologia* (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka,), 61-3.

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 66.

confirm sacrosanct ways of behaviour and evaluation, which is no doubt related to the danger of losing the sense of peace and obviousness. In this respect, a stranger is not treated as an ordinary wanderer, who comes and goes, but as a person, who arrives and stays within a given group, taking an ambivalent position. In a way, strangers belong to this group, but, at the same time, they are excluded. Their position is combination of proximity and distance.⁴

Strangers, trying to adjust to the new environments, make an effort to assimilate autochthons' lifestyle by oftentimes very ineptly imitating their phraseology, dress code, manner of work and rest, religious customs, sense of humour, cuisine, etc. These attempts due to their clumsiness initially make locals smile, but afterwards incite reactions full of derision, irony and sarcasm, ultimately leading to an unbearable mixture of amusement and aggression. In the face of increasing inquietude, which unquestionably dominates superficial cheerfulness, anti-stranger self-defence strategies are born; they frequently boil down to separatism on territorial, spiritual or mixed levels. The first one consists in placing strangers in strictly appointed places, forbidding them to leave (ghettos, ethnic reserves, restricted documents, distinctive clothes, emblems of race). On the other hand, the second one is expressed by an attempt to reduce the number of meetings with strangers to rare cases of business and administration that do not imply building spiritual relations. The use of spiritual separation is linked to putting up strong social barriers based on misconceptions and fanatical antipathy, which tends to end up with perceiving strangers as the root of all evil and danger, as well as with treating them with greatest disdain (false accusations of spreading contagious diseases, magical practices, membership in terrorist organisations, celebration of bloody rituals, etc.).⁵

While the above mentioned practices of separation are the manifestations of radical ways of reacting to strangers typical of the past, modern urban, pluralistic and mobile societies have worked out a more refined technique that facilitates putting up with the experience of universal alienation in big urban agglomerations, which Erving Goffman called "civil inattention." It consists in feigning a total lack of interest in anything that comes about, especially through avoiding eye contact with another person, which might

⁴ Cf. Georg Simmel, *Socjologia* (Warszawa: PWN, 1975), 504-12; Alfred Schutz, "The Stranger in Social Psychology," in Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*, vol. 2 of "Studies in Social Theory" (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 96-101.

⁵ Cf. Bauman, *Socjologia*, 68-9.

otherwise be interpreted as an invitation to break anonymity and make an established personal relation. As a result, the art of feigning the inattention to others (i.e. looking without seeing), mastered to a perfect degree, leads to "treating strangers as non-personal backdrop, from which all figures and really important matters are cut."⁶ Even though inhabitants of villages, immigrants or refugees, arriving at big cities as so-called strangers, thanks to the common practice of "civil inattention," may enjoy more safety with regard to privacy from burdensome curiosity of former neighbours, the cost of it – the sense of "loneliness of a crowd," experience of depersonalisation of human relations based more or less on the principle of goods exchange and abandonment in critical situations may prove too much to gain required mental and social stability. Eventually one day, "civil inattention" turns to moral insensitivity, which makes such values as empathy, responsibility and selflessness disappear.

2. JESUS AS THE SACRAMENT OF GOD IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH "STRANGERS"

The contemporary man partakes in a kind of "experiment on experience."⁷ What it means is that in the present, running reality he is bombarded with a multitude of information, advertisements, ideological proposal, meetings, task to be done that he feels powerless to do. He hardly copes with systematising the vast stream of experiences, with their description, evaluation and formulation of their moral implications. This is why contextual theology, unfolded in the post-Conciliar period, wishes to address the people who have been trying to find answers to contemporary issues in the Christian Tradition. Hence, it makes use of correlational method, which is based on linking and showing mutual dependencies between two important poles. The first one of them focuses on an earnest description of the existential situation of the contemporary man and the problems he is faced with. The second one seeks an adequate answer in the Christian Tradition of faith. For this reason, in the context of an escalating phenomenon of the mass migration of the inhabitants of Africa and Near East to Europe, present-day theological

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷ Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Menschliche Erfahrung und Glaube an Jesus Christus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), 21.

reflection ought to address the root experience – the Gospel accounts of Jesus meeting the ones who would be called “strangers.”

Two events are particularly worth mentioning. The first one is Jesus’s encounter with the Samaritan woman [Jn 4:1-42]. She belonged to an ethnically mixed group of people who, at the times of Jesus, were deemed religious heretics unclean in the face of the Law of Moses. They were an alienated, marginalised and isolated society, despised by the Jews of that times. Social barriers put up on the basis stereotypes and mutual accusations had resulted in the ban on any forms of contact that were religiously sanctioned.⁸ On top of that, if we consider the customs which forbade men to talk with strange women, Jesus’s meeting and conversation with the Samaritan woman seems like a provoking novelty. In its course, Jesus by means of his mode of behaviour and manner of conversation with the woman, affirms her human dignity regardless of her ethnical background, or religious and moral conduct. Pointing directly to the mysteries of her life, heavily burdened with sin, Jesus, without resorting to anger, condemnation or disdain, is the first one to overcome the invisible wall of suspicion. He makes room for mutual trust and sincere personal conversation, during which the Samaritan experiences both the liberating power of the truth about herself, and the epiphanic dimension of the real encounter with the Saviour.

Throughout the dialogue – a beautiful example of the victory of real humanity over inhuman practice of ruthless indifference – the Samaritan recognises the promised Messiah in Jesus, simultaneously discovering the meaning of her own life, which from then on will be devoted to proclaiming the liberating power of love among her compatriots; the power she has experienced during the meeting. The event narrated in the Gospel of John points to the transforming power of an authentically human dialogue, which changes strangers into friends and promoters of the salvation among the social groups that are enslaved by the desire for aggression and revenge. Especially in the environment of the contemporary “eclipse of humanity,”⁹ the spiritual transformation of the Samaritan becomes the affirmation of the truth that the dialogue with good-willed people may be an effective instrument of building peace, reconciliation and agreement in the post-modern world afflicted by doubt in both God and man.

⁸ Cf. Richard Coggins, „Samarytanie,” in *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Warszawa: Vocatio, 1996), 700-2.

⁹ Cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *Kim jest człowiek* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014), 59.

Another event that shows Christ's attitude to strangers is His conversation with the Apostle John, who tells the Teacher about an anonymous, itinerant exorcist who would drive away demons in His name [Mk 9:38-41]. For John, the main problem lies in the fact that the exorcist is not one of the Apostles and, thus, he should be banned from performing such activities. Using modern language, it is certain that an unknown, itinerant exorcist does not fit in the category of the Apostolic "we." Nor does he belong to any other determined missionary group that may be referred to as "they." Consequently, he is neither a friend nor a foe. Rather, he is a representative of a category of people who should be called "strangers," who step into the territory of an activity proper to the Apostles of Jesus. Although John does not know the name of the itinerant exorcist, he realises well that his religious activity is but an imitation of the work of the Apostles, perhaps a caricature of the real Apostolic mission. In the eyes of John and the remaining Apostles, the unknown exorcist seems like an utter stranger. He is considered a usurper and should be deprived of the right to perform his activity, or at least territorially separated so that he may not interfere the order on the terrain of the Apostolic mission. Perhaps, another manner of reacting to the activity of the self-proclaimed exorcist would be spiritual separation based on the conscious limitation of the possibility of contact with the "strange" apostle, connected to the propaganda about the supposed demonic source of his benevolence.

The central meaning of the passage of the Gospel, in the form of an apothegm, which we have been analysing, is borne by the following Jesus's logion: "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us" [Mk 9:39-40]. By these words Jesus wishes to explain to the Apostles that there is a mysterious kinship of good done by people belonging to various social groups, and none of them should lay claim to the monopoly on the broadly understood benevolence. Performing good deeds, represented by giving "a cup of water to drink" [Mk 9:41] makes room for the atmosphere of the meeting that unites people of different races, religions and political, economic and social views. In other words, doing good regardless of religious or political views gives an opportunity of constructing a special form of unity, which, being the fruit of the common practice of the Kingdom of God on the earth, comes to be a telling testimony to God, who works mysteriously through His Spirit in the hearts of all people, who may be distant from one another not only spatially, but also religiously and ideologically. Possibly, the approval of the positive activity of an anonymous

exorcist expressed by Jesus constitutes an evangelical incentive for modern Christians to have deeper faith in the human ability to improve the world, in which only man as a free and responsible subject is an image of God – the source of all goodness.

3. THE CHURCH AS THE SACRAMENT OF THE WORLD AND A HOME FOR THE “STRANGERS”

The Church, as a sacramental community of the resurrected Christ, lives under concrete social, political and cultural conditions. It was not sent into the world to condemn it audaciously, but to become the humble sign of hope and the instrument of salvation, which come from God.¹⁰ However, she cannot forget that due to her theandric character, she constitutes a unique form of a community, in which the Divine dimension is closely bound with the human one, creating a holy community of sinners [cf. LG 8; 13]. Throughout centuries, she has kept realising the essence of her mission which comprises the service of the salvation of the world in the context of changing forms of social life. Especially today, in the hour of unfolding secularism and religious individualism¹¹, as well as the still unresolved European crisis of immigration. The Church is learning about her communal structure, understanding it also in the categories of moral responsibility. Being the ecclesial community, rooted in God and present in the world (vertical and horizontal communion), means at the same time being responsible for the presence and the future of man, in both the individual and collective dimension.

The ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council reminds us that the core of the ecclesial community is believers' participation in the life of God, which gives birth to the task of building human unity on both the local and the global scale. The Church has been presented to the world as the gift of the Triune God, who wishes that all people as a community united by the Holy Spirit, strove for the fullness of salvation, walking on the paths of the world toward the fullness of the Kingdom of God. As Bishop Andrzej Czaja has rightly pointed out, the Conciliar fathers tie the term *communio* with the

¹⁰ Cf. Antoni Nadbrzeżny, “Eklezjologia odpowiedzialności. Z namysłu nad encykliką ‘Redemptor hominis,’” *Roczniki Teologii Dogmatycznej*, no. 1, 56 (2009): 34-9.

¹¹ Cf. Janusz Mariański, “Indywidualizm religijny we współczesnym świecie wyzwaniem dla Kościoła,” in *‘Communio’ w chrześcijańskiej refleksji o Kościele*, ed. Andrzej Czaja, Marek Marczewski (Lublin: TN KUL, 2004), 30-40.

meaning and mission of the Church, indicating clearly that she does not exist for herself, but she is realised in the sacramental service for the human community that is included, by the will of God Himself, in the ongoing process of the universal spiritual renewal and gathering of the world in Christ [cf. LG 2]. This entails the necessity for the constant involvement in the work of building peace, justice, freedom, unity and the development of the civilisation of love. Nevertheless, communion ecclesiology, which stresses the truth about the Church being the instrument of union with God and unity of all humanity in Christ [cf. LG 1], cannot be reduced to a mere organisational and pragmatic dimension, since an effective service for the world through the work of building peace, justice and unity, demands of the Church the care for unfolding the vertical dimension, which relies on drawing from the supernatural gift of the Divine life that is granted in the Word of God and the holy sacraments. The ecclesial communion never contradicts the mission of the Church, and the authentic and fruitful mission is always born of a deep communion. These realities unite and influence each other, making the *communio* both the source and fruit of the mission, which in turn is beneficial for building the integral communion.¹²

The realisation of the salvific mission of the Church calls for sensitivity to discreet yet powerful presence of the Life-Giving Spirit, who helps us read the “signs of the times” and grants indispensable charismata to the ecclesial community in the circumstances of contemporary challenges. Hence, the Church as the *communio* may never be interpreted as a meta-historical mystical community, as such alienated from the temporal world and egoistically and exclusively interested in her own eschatological fulfillment. As Pope Francis has rightly noted, the Church should make her merciful and maternal look embrace also those who, being strange newcomers, regardless of their professed religion and social status, turn up in Europe as the children of one Father.¹³

The credible theological reflection on the Church, understood as the *communio*, cannot remain on the mere general level, but it ought to consider concrete social phenomena that pose current challenges. Without the disambiguation, even the prettiest theory of the ecclesial communion may easily turn to a purely abstract and utopian ideology. It was already in 2014, during his speech in the European Parliament, that Pope Francis paid attention to

¹² Cf. Andrzej Czaja, “‘*Communio*’ w eklezjologii Soboru Watykańskiego II,” in ‘*Communio*’ w chrześcijańskiej refleksji o Kościele, 122-3.

¹³ Cf. Francis, *Message for the 101st World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2015.

the urgent need for solving the painful issue of migration, which, due to its size, posed a challenge for the whole European community. Without mutual support of the European Union countries, irresponsible particular attempts at solving this issue might come about. These could include humiliation of the immigrant's dignity, introduction of slave labour and arousal of civil unrest. He decidedly demanded that the Mediterranean not become a "vast cemetery" for those who, arriving in Europe in boats, are in desperate need of help and shelter. He also called on the whole European community to set up proper legislature that would ensure protection of the European citizens' rights, simultaneously being hospitable to immigrants, as well as to be involved in the brave politics aimed at helping the countries afflicted by internal conflicts to eradicate not only the results of the great migration, but also its causes.¹⁴

Almost a year later, observing the escalating migration flow that frequently triggered death and the tragedy of human trafficking among the refugees, Pope Francis noted that their lives were similar to the lot of alienated people, who experience fears and suspicions in the new land on the part of the locals. They had become a severe challenge for European communities, mainly because they, as aliens, tended to question the traditional lifestyle of the inhabitants of the Old Continent, caused changes in the legal systems, experience the risk of racism, discrimination and xenophobia. In the face of the increasing fear of refugees (both understandable and hysterical), the Pope reminds us that despite their status, they also have great creative potential. Provided that they respect the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, obey its laws and make their contribution to its expenditure, they might play an important part in its development.¹⁵

What springs from Francis's speeches is the encouragement directed at the Church to prove a hospitable home and the sacrament of salvation (including its temporal aspect) in the times of the dramatic experiences of alienated immigrants and refugees. This should be expressed in a bold decision of the merciful reception of the strangers, according to Christ's call: "For I was a stranger and you welcomed me" [Mt 25:35]. The Pope asks that the Church should look at the immigrants and refugees in the light of the Divine Revelation, as the persons who have Christ's features and, welcoming strangers, be aware that by doing so welcomes God Himself. Christian charity (*caritas*) selflessly shown to newcomers, regardless of their religion and without overt

¹⁴ Cf. Francis, *Address to the European Parliament*, 2014.

¹⁵ Cf. Francis, *Message for the 102nd World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2015.

or covert proselytism, may be an exceptional epiphanic experience, enabling them to see the face of “the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement” [2 Cor 1:3] in the deeds of believers and good-willed people. In this particular moment in history, the Church community may not close her doors to those who, in danger of death, as it were, “stand at the door and knock.” The gift of Divine mercy, granted to the Church bountifully through Christ’s Paschal Mystery, has become the believers’ motivation and, at the same time, strength to show solidarity with the suffering and to take responsibility for their lot. In this sense, we may state that the answer to God’s love, poured out by the Spirit, lies in the solidarity and responsibility for the refugees, linked with the care for preventing their terrible escapes by smothering in the cradle the causes of their mass migrations, including violence, human trafficking, slave labour, gigantic disproportions accessing material and spiritual goods, forced labour of children and their membership in military organisations. Pope Francis understands well the concerns found in the hearts of Europeans about potential dangers connected with the arrival of such a great number of immigrants and refugees, among whom people of bad intentions or with criminal records may be found. Therefore, public opinion ought to have access to reliable information that would put an end to unfounded speculations, because help given to the needy should never be either irrational nor naïve.

Pope Francis’s ecclesiological reflection, expressed on the day of migrants, clearly corresponds with St John Paul II’s views. At the beginning of the 21st century, he came up with a motto that soon became the pastoral programme on its own: “To make the Church the home and the school of communion.”¹⁶ It is closely connected to the papal postulate to promote the spirituality of communion that is the very foundation of any kinds of the Church activities or policies. Undoubtedly, this spirituality serves deepening a personal relationship with God, strengthening the sense of Christian brotherhood and human cooperation, animating sensitivity to difficult challenges of modern times, as well as spreading the ecclesial “imagination of mercy” in relation to “strangers.” In the face of sometimes embarrassing arbitrary attempts at defining a minimal dose of goodness that would be enough to calm one’s conscience, what comes to mind are Archbishop Józef Życiński’s words. Answering the question of what is Christ’s greatest expectation, he said: “In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus showed us the ideal of Christian existence.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, no. 43.

Let us not make a crib sheet of the Eight Beatitudes and not reduce them to one that is said to be the most important. In this way, we may soon turn a masterpiece into a comic book.”¹⁷

4. PASTORAL CONCLUSIONS

The above presented theological reflection on the mission of the Church in the circumstances of the contemporary phenomenon of the mass migration enables us to put forward a few pastoral suggestions.

Within the parish catechesis for adults, it is worth reminding people about the basic elements of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, which has remained obscure among the majority of Polish believers. There is an urgent need for a lucid explanation of the goal of the Church, her meaning, values and line of action in the modern, pluralistic and mobile world. Catechesis ought to present the Church as the universal communion (*communio universalis*), rooted in the supernatural life of the Triune God and, at the same time facing the world, open to people of all cultures and nations. Despite manifestations of fanaticism, aggression and hatred, we must develop the awareness of the fact that, being children of one God, we are a big, global human family, whose social, cultural, political and religious differences should by no means be treated as a reason for killing, humiliating, marginalising, deriding and excluding.

During the days of Christian culture, which are held in many parishes, it would be valuable to organise lectures of experts on cultural, oriental, religious and sociological studies, as well as on the Catholic social teaching, which, in plain terms, would present the panorama of the contemporary complex social, political, cultural and religious issues, connected with the phenomenon of the mass migration of immigrants and refugees to Europe. The lectures and discussions we are encouraging may be beneficial for both the creation of the Christian culture of solidarity with “strangers,” and elimination of harmful stereotypes about migrants and refugees, which are the source of irrational fears that contribute to putting up the walls of enmity. Prayer and apostolic groups that are found in many parishes are an appropriate ground for learning about and analysing the content of the latest papal

¹⁷ Józef Życiński, *Niewidzialne światło. Z abp. Józefem Życińskim rozmawiają Dorota Zańko i Jarosław Gowin* (Kraków: Znak, 2011), 304.

documents dedicated to the issues of peace and respect of human rights, responsibility, solidarity, love, brotherhood, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, mission of Christians in the modern world, as well as the attitude to non-Christian religions (e.g. the encyclicals: *Redemptor hominis*, *Evangelium vitae*, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, *Deus caritas est*, *Spe salvi*, *Veritas in caritate*; the exhortations: *Ecclesia in Europa*, *Evangelii gaudium*; as well as papal messages for the World Day of Peace and the World Day of Migrants and Refugees).

One of the important tasks of the Catholic parish community is preaching Catholic optimism that springs from the faith that every man, created in God's image, has an ability to be led by the law of love, whose power is greater than the power of the evil that we observe. Numerous parish and diocesan events (fairs, papal days, week of prayer for the Christian unity, Day of Judaism, Day of Islam, etc.) may serve as opportunities to organise meetings with affable and open people who represent various cultural and religious traditions, or to collaborate with them during charitable events. Faced with a disconcerting tendency to assume strictly defensive attitudes that are full of fear and inclined to put up physical and spiritual walls, we are encouraged to deepen believers' awareness of the social dimension of the Eucharist, in which Christ is the unifying factor and in the power of His Spirit He sends Christians to bravely, prudently and selflessly build the culture of dialogue and solidarity with real refugees, runaways, exiles and migrants, which will lead to the creation of a more just and human world.

Despite many negative and dramatic experiences of the man of today, characterised by the sad vision of axiological nihilism and xenophobic ideologies, the Church, by preaching the liberating message of the Gospel and giving the example of everyday life, may and should be the credible sacrament of hope and hospitality for those who, due to abject poverty and wars, have left their homeland, as if intuitively seeking merciful support on the part of the ecclesial community that Pope Francis has called "a mother with a heart open to the whole world ... without borders."

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