

Mercy Towards Migrants and Refugees

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are living in the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy now. Pope Francis encourages us to become witnesses of mercy, saying, "at times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, n.3). We ask, then, to whom in particular we are supposed to witness the Lord's mercy.

With the theme of the world day of migrants and refugees 2016 as *Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy*, Pope Francis stated: "Migration movements are now a structural reality, and our primary issue must be to deal with the present emergency phase." And so following the message of the Holy Father, I urge you to have mercy towards migrants and refugees who are desperately in need of support from our society. Since the press has often released reports on some social disturbances caused by migrants and refugees recently, it is our concern that this may not provoke more negative perceptions about them. I think that it is necessary to change our mind-set so that we can see migrants and refugees with evangelical eyes and embrace them as persons with whom we should live together in this world.

What is the reality of our society towards refugees? The number of asylum-seekers in South Korea reached about 5,700 last year, and only about 100 of them won their legal status. This means the refugee

recognition rate in South Korea is less than 2%. According to the statistics of UNHCR, the average refugee recognition rate at the global level is over 30%. Accordingly the UN urges the Korean government to increase refugee recognition every year. What is the reason why the refugee recognition rate in many countries including those in Western Europe is 15 times higher than that in our country? It is because the Western European countries put more effort into protecting those unrecognized refugees from threats to their lives rather than exercising their administrative power over selecting those unqualified refugees. I express my admiration for their attention and commitment to respecting and observing human life and human rights. It is hoped that our government will make more resolute efforts to respect and protect human life and human rights by reinforcing its administrative power.

In addition, the Korean National Assembly passed a counterterrorism bill last March. What kind of image first comes to your mind upon hearing the word, *terror*? I hope that my guess is not right, but it is probably a face of a Muslim from the Middle East. Since the various conflicts in the Middle East have often made world headlines, the Middle East has become synonymous with conflict and terror. Moreover, the current atrocities of the Islamic State (IS) have added fuel to the fire. The conflicts of the Middle East, however, reflect a part of the political, economic and religious complexity in connection with the West. Therefore, the Middle East and Muslims alone cannot be blamed for the conflict and

terror in the Middle East. Contemporary mass media, which look only for sensational eye-catching news, are not less responsible for that. Pope Francis has said that "public opinion also needs to be correctly formed, not least to prevent unwarranted fears and speculations detrimental to migrants." He has stressed the social reasonability of the mass media. Hence, our mass media should deliver a report on migrants, especially Muslims, with extra discretion in order not to infringe on their human rights.

My beloved brothers and sisters, this year is designated as the blessed Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. At the same time, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the enactment of the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) by the United Nations General Assembly. Our country also joined the convention in 1978. For Christians, 'mercy' and 'migrants' are not two totally different concepts. If we are true Christians, we should be merciful to everyone. I ask all the faithful to be more attentive to and to be more merciful towards migrants and refugees this years. I sincerely wish and pray that we all become witnesses of mercy, taking one step forward for peace in our society.

May 1, 2016

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