

Homily for World Day for Migrants and Refugees, Sunday, January 18th 2009 at Holy Redeemer Church, Brixton

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INTRODUCTION

Today the Church celebrates the World Day for Migrants and Refugees and asks us to pray for all who leave home for whatever reason, to pray for the families they leave behind and to pray for the communities and churches that welcome them.

It is providential that I am able to celebrate this important day here with the Filipino community in South East London and with the Scalabrini Fathers. One of the highlights of 2008 for me was to visit the Philippines with Canon James Cronin last October. During our eight days we met a lot of people (the Cardinal, four bishops, many priests, sisters and lay people and the British Ambassador). We visited three parishes, an orphanage and a university; we attended a conference on Migration and finally we met the Bishop and the Scalabrini Fathers who do so much good work for migrants in Manila and in Asia.

Four things struck me about the Philippines:

- (a) The first was the sheer size of the country. I never realized it was so big and had such a large population – 80 million people. Moreover, I never realized that 8 million Filipinos live outside their homeland with many millions more dependent on the help they send home.
- (b) Secondly, I was impressed by the faith of the people and the life of the Church. This was epitomized in the way the laity through the small basic communities were involved not just in sacramental programmes and prayer groups, but in very practical projects like delivering health education, running credit unions, and providing self help projects for farmers and fishermen.
- (c) Thirdly, I was impressed by the way the Church cares for migrants. Led by Bishop Cantillas and the Scalabrini Fathers, the Church – Bishops, priests, sisters and laity – were involved in a whole series of programmes aimed at preparing people before they leave the Philippines and helping pastoral workers to provide practical and pastoral support for Filipinos all over the world – in the US, Canada, the Middle East and Europe.
- (d) Finally, I was impressed by the missionary attitude of the Church. There was a strong belief that every baptised person is called to mission – in other words, migrants are also missionaries.

Our Readings today are all about how we experience and how we listen to God's call in our daily lives and in the world in which we live and work.

- (a) In the First Reading Samuel describes how God called him. Three times God calls him in the middle of the night. Three times Samuel leaps to his feet thinking that it is Eli. Three times he is mistaken. Eventually on the fourth time he realises that it is God (through Eli) who is calling him.

- (b) In the Gospel John describes how the first disciples are called. First there is the call, then a period of reflection and re-assurance, finally there is a response.

There is a very clear message in those Readings for us today and that is that God calls each and every one of us to be the best person and the best Christian we can be. Each of us is called to be the best father or mother, brother or sister, carer or nurse that we can be. God doesn't call us through extraordinary ways – through miracles or visions. He doesn't send emails or make telephone calls. God calls us through the ordinary events and people of our daily life.

That is the message that Pope Benedict has made in his Message to the Church on Migration Sunday. Like St. Paul, all of us and especially migrants, are called to be missionaries wherever we are, wherever we go, and wherever we work.

I would like therefore to say thank you to the Filipino people and to all the Filipino communities here in London and in England and Wales for all you have brought to the Church and all you do for the Church. You have brought a deep commitment to your faith, a deep commitment to your family and a deep commitment to your Church. The Church here in England and Wales has been greatly enriched by your presence.

Secondly, I would like to say thank you also for the way you have enriched our society. Your presence and work in hospitals and care homes is deeply appreciated. My own hope is that the government, in the application of the new rules on immigration, will recognise the wonderful contribution the Filipino people make to health and caring services in Britain and recognise how much your contribution is appreciated by patients and their families.

Thirdly, I would like to say thank you to all the chaplains and to the Scalabrini Fathers in particular who do so much to accompany, advise, and help migrants, especially Filipino migrants, not only here in London but throughout the world.

Finally, as the Church in the Philippines celebrates the Feast of Santo Nino, we pray for all your families and indeed all families affected by migration throughout the world and we ask God to help us wherever we are and wherever we go to be good missionaries for Christ and good ambassadors for the Philippines.