

Prot. N. 00761/15

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35)

Dear brother Ministers,

In recent months, almost daily, our eyes have seen desperate images, even images of death, and we have heard news that tells us the stories of men, women, and children who are fleeing from the countries they come from, pushed by war, by poverty, carrying in their hearts the hope for a better future. These brothers and sisters have made long and dangerous travels, directed principally toward the countries of Europe; they have found dangers, rejection, violence, and death. Already we have lost count of how many lives the Mediterranean Sea has swallowed up in the efforts of people trying to cross from northern Africa. These voyages, organized by unscrupulous persons who demand enormous sums of money, are made on old boats or on insecure rubber rafts that are normally crowded beyond the limits of reasonable safety. We have seen the bodies of adults and children floating lifelessly in the water, men and women hurting themselves as they cross barriers of barbed wire, long lines of human beings walking on European roads as they look for work, stability, and peace. In the midst of this dramatic exodus, many people have kept alive the flame of the hope for solidarity. The governments of various countries are organizing plans for a dignified welcome.

Pope Francis has often used very strong expressions that I hope have moved each of us, in order to move us to have a welcoming and sympathetic heart toward the immigrants and refugees. At times his words have raised up reactions of hostility, of criticism rooted in egoism and racism. But the gravest sin into which we can all fall is indifference! It's just like the priest and the Levite of the parable of the Good Samaritan: faced with a wounded man they passed by on the other side. In these months I have often thought of chapter 25 of the gospel of Matthew, where Jesus speaks of the final judgment. In verses 34 to 40 Jesus speaks of a concrete love, incarnate; he speaks of people who are fed, given to drink, visited, consoled, welcomed: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Mt 25:35). It is important for our faith that the words of Jesus descend into our hearts: *Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.* (Mt 25:40) I want to thank you, Ministers and all the friars of the Order for all the times you have made concrete the words of Jesus, with the works of charity and solidarity with which we Capuchin Friars Minor have written and continue to write wonderful pages to the glory of God.

The exodus of peoples looks to our vocation as minors, to our charity, to our creative concreteness in its ability to make adequate responses. Pope Francis in the Angelus of this past September 6 said, *“Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee*

*death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be “neighbours” of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope. It’s not enough to say, “Take heart. Be patient”.... Christian hope has a fighting spirit, with the tenacity of one who goes toward a sure goal...**May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine of Europe welcome one family, beginning with my Diocese of Rome.**”*

I am convinced that in many fraternities and in parishes entrusted to our friars there are already many initiatives in place that are responding to this invitation of the Pope. Let us feel strongly called by this request and together let us try to give an adequate and coordinated response. In this regard I have asked Br. Benedict Ayodi, Secretary of our Office of Justice, Peace, and the Care of Creation to convoke a meeting at which I myself will be present. Concretely I ask the Provincial Ministers, Custodes, and Delegates of all of Europe to appoint a representative that our pastoral, social, and charitable service can give a valid contribution in this area. Representatives from Eritrea, Turkey, and Lebanon are also warmly invited. For the Italian provinces I ask that four representatives be appointed for the north, central, south, and Sicily, respectively.

The meeting will be held at Frascati and is planned from supper on October 15 to lunch on the 17. Br. Benedict will be sending you further details about the event.

I ask you to send this letter to all the friars of your circumscriptions.

I thank you ahead of time for the effort and cooperation that you will give me in carrying out this meeting.

Fraternally in the Lord,

Rome, 15 September 2015


Br. Mauro Jöhri
General Minister OFM Cap.