

REFLECTION AND PRAYER GUIDE FOR ADULTS

Like Jesus Christ, forced to flee

**Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting
and Integrating Internally Displaced Persons**

**27 September 2020
World Day of Migrants and Refugees**

Introduction to the prayer guide for adults

The journey of those who are forced to leave their homes and head towards an unknown future often involves a sudden departure, triggered by wars, violence, famines and droughts. These people break away from their past, and only bring the essential with them: the lighter and more indispensable their belongings, the better. The vigil that we propose for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees starts from here: from the symbol of a bag, a suitcase. The few things that migrants carry hide the secrets of their lives on a journey of foreigners and pilgrims through a land that is not their own. A path of suffering, but also of possible hospitality and welcome, a hope for a new world of brotherhood and sisterhood.

This vigil was prepared by an ecumenical group and was conceived as a tool for prayer during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic which does not allow for large gatherings. It is for individuals, for those who live alone and cannot join others in prayer, and for small groups, families or communities,. However, it can also be used in public community celebrations. As circumstances allow, the entire script can be used in a single session or in two or three sessions.

We intend to propose a two-fold listening to both the voices of those exhausted by the solitude and heaviness of the journey, and to the voice of the Word of God—the God who was an present and liberating companion in the exodus and exile of Israel and who has accompanied migrations in all ages.

The first part offers a reading of the migratory experience of Jesus's family. Observing at the figure of Joseph, who had the courage to leave everything and flee to protect the one who was entrusted to him (Mt 2, 13-15), we suggest thoughts and actions to explore the hopes and desires of those who leave their countries and homes nowadays.

The second part helps us retrace the inner journey of Ruth, a foreign woman, a friend in migration (Rt 1,6-19). Her thoughts as she faced her critical decision interweave with those of today's migrants; the Word of God and human words echo each other, and that Word becomes a call for us.

The third part bases an invitation to prayer on a modern re-interpretation of Psalm 137, the psalm of those who, as they experience the condition of being in a foreign land far away, beg not to be forgotten. They gratefully add: "Do not forget those who offered us a blanket, a sandwich or even only a smile of encouragement despite their fatigue."

The conclusion urges us to embrace the cry of the countless victims and the forgotten, to stand together with those who seek refuge and protection, and to surrender to God for whom no one is stranger.

Prayer is about life: we are all migrants seeking shared bread, dignity and hospitality.

*Marco Cioni, Alessandro Cortesi, Andrea Grillo,
Lidia Maggi, Serena Noceti, Eugenia Romano, Rosa Siciliano.*

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“Yes, if I had not migrated, I wouldn’t have known the word ‘nostalgia’.

If I had not migrated, I wouldn’t have crossed the bridge between “differences”.

*If I had not migrated, cultural and social values, religions and doctrines, people, the East, North, South
and West would have remained prisoners in my books forever.*

*If I had not migrated, how could I have written about the bird in a cage, the sad autumn leaves, the
black and desolate clouds, the withered flowers, the sea and the waves?*

But now, I can understand life better.

If I had not migrated.”

(Abdullah Naderi, born in Afghanistan, migrated to Italy in 2016,
in Maria Paola Mioni, edited by, *Non essere triste viaggiatore. Poesie dall’esilio*, ed. Infinito 2019, 70).

Prayer Guide

For the Day of Migrants and Refugees 2020

ADULTS

This vigil was prepared by an ecumenical group and was conceived as a tool for prayer during the time when the Covid-19 pandemic does not allow for gatherings and large meetings. It is intended for individuals, those who live alone and cannot join others in prayer, and for small groups, families and small communities. However, it can also be used in public community celebrations.

The structure of the vigil can be followed, with the proposed introduction and conclusion, and then one or more of the three phases can be chosen as befits the particular circumstances.

At the beginning, the following items should be prepared so that they can be used during the vigil:

- *a suitcase*
- *a children's red T-shirt*
- *some Post-it notes with pens*
- *newspaper cut-out images of the faces of women of different backgrounds and cultures*
- *an ID card or photo of a residency permit.*

(Other objects relevant to migration can be added: some food, clothes, a blanket, a mobile phone, a phone charger, a Bible, a prayer book, the photos of someone's loved ones, a bag of earth...)

INTRODUCTION

“For God commands your angels to guard you in all your ways” (Ps 91, 11)

Reader 1: We have gathered here, this evening, to hear the voices of the many brothers and sisters who, at one point in their lives, young or elderly, in the midst of their lives, decided to leave the country where they were born and raised to seek better conditions for a more dignified, just and free life elsewhere. At times, fratricidal conflicts or wars drove them away; at times, droughts, famines, unfair economic systems that impoverish them, creating unbearable conditions of malnutrition, disease, and misery, forced them to leave. At times, it is the hope for a better life for them and their children that pushed them to venture on risky journeys; at other times, it is political persecution or social exclusion. Together with them and their lives, exhausted by the solitude and fatigue of the journey, we want to listen to the Word of that God who embraced the experience of the exodus and the exile as his own alongside his people, Israel. We intend to take this “movement” as a perspective from which we can discover God’s plan for each of us, for all of humanity, for those who have no country or mother tongue in their daily lives.

Reader 2: Migrants and refugees travel light because they know that the journey will be dangerous. They have a bag, a backpack, a suitcase. A few essential things which they believe will allow survival and safety: money, a telephone, and a phone charger, medications, some clothes, and their papers. Perhaps some symbols to preserve the memory of their roots. After all, the young Italians leaving to find a job abroad can only gather a few things in their suitcase that make their lives normal.

A suitcase shall accompany us in this celebration: a symbol shall be extracted from it at every stage to help us in prayer.

INVOCATION

Reader 1: We are all migrants. We are travellers. We are on transition on this earth. Peoples and cultures construct the plot of history, they paint a splendid canvas of different places and rites, languages and habits, even though the thread is the same.

All: Migrant Lord, give us the desire to cross the border.

Reader 1: Our feet are on the move. Any way to move, even in this absent-minded and forgetful Europe. The same empty stomach, the same fear. Anxiety and anchors. At times, dead weights that prevent us from looking ahead, accepting fragility. And yet, it's time to leave. To take a suitcase and figure out what to pack and what to leave at home.

All: Travelling Lord, give us the strength to take the most comfortable sandals with us. Only one pair of shoes.

Reader 1: Because the journey is long. We set out, we are all the same in this migratory journey, nomads or refugees. We are fleeing unjust wars or travelling to find a job somewhere else. For hunger and dignity. To dream new dreams. Few talk of the right to migrate nowadays. "Few talk of the reciprocity of rights both for those who flee from wars and those who simply want to fulfil their dreams..." (Andrea Segre, *L'ordine delle cose*). The same dreams and the same expectations. Certainly, the suffering, exhaustion, and especially the chances of survival are different.

All: Travelling Lord, help us cross the border

Reader 1: “Right there, in the midst of the rolling waves, in an unidentified place, without landmarks to hold onto, where there is just the horizon, the sun during the day and the stars at night, and vomit, anxiety, silence, and bodies pressing one against the other, right there, in that unspecified place, they say farewell to the land of their youth. Or rather, some manage to say goodbye, others simply fade away.” (*Alessandro Leogrande, La frontiera*)

All: Migrant Lord, give me the strength to walk.

Reader 1: What will the city beyond the border be like? What will the sky look like in these unknown places? What smells and faces shall colour my void? “*You could ask us, Father Tonino, whether if once departed we are walking; whether we stand up to join and serve mankind, every man and woman. If you were to ask us this, we would have to feel ashamed of our inaction and our constant justifications*” (Pope Francis, Molfetta, 20th April 2020)

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FIRST STEP

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE MIGRANT GOD

“For he is our peace:

he who made both one,

and broke down the dividing wall...

that he might create... one new person” (Ep 2, 14-15).

*While listening to Sting's song, Inshallah <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRGKCcf4XUk>
a red T-shirt, one like those that mothers make their children wear during sea journeys so that they can be easily visible,
and a block of post-it notes are pulled out of the suitcase.*

Lyrics

*Sleeping child, on my shoulder Those
around us, curse the sea Anxious
mother turning fearful Who can blame
her, blaming me? Inshallah, Inshallah*

*If it be your will, it shall come to pass
Inshallah, Inshallah If it be your will*

*As the wind blows, growing colder
Against the sad boats, as we flee
Anxious eyes, search in darkness With
the rising of the sea Inshallah,
Inshallah*

*If it be your will, it shall come to pass
Inshallah, Inshallah If it be your will*

Sea of worries, sea of fears

In our country, only tears

In our future there's no past

*If it be your will, it shall come to pass
Inshallah, Inshallah*

*If it be your will, it shall come to pass
Inshallah, Inshallah If it be your will*

*Bambino addormentato, sulla mia spalla
Chi ci circonda, maledica il mare
Madre ansiosa presa da paura
Chi può biasimarla, dare la colpa a me?
Inshallah, Inshallah*

*Se è la tua volontà, si
realizzerà Inshallah, Inshallah
Se è la tua volontà*

*Mentre il vento soffia, sempre più freddo
Contro le tristi barche, mentre fuggiamo
Occhi ansiosi, cerca nel buio
Con il sollevarsi del
mare Inshallah,
Inshallah*

*Se è la tua volontà, si
realizzerà Inshallah, Inshallah
Se è la tua volontà*

*Mare di angosce, mare di paure
Nel nostro paese, solo lacrime
Nel nostro futuro non c'è passato
Se è la tua volontà, si realizzerà
Inshallah, Inshallah*

*Se è la tua volontà, si
realizzerà Inshallah, Inshallah
Se è la tua volontà*

The Gospel of Mt 2, 13-15 is read

From the Gospel of Matthew

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled: “*Out of Egypt! I called my son.*”

Reader 1: Jesus experienced the hard reality of migration as a small child: he lived in a foreign land with his father and mother, in a place that was a land of utmost oppression and slavery in the memory of Israel. We want to meditate on this text. We start with Joseph who had the courage to leave everything and go away to protect his family. Let us try to imagine his thoughts, the hope that urged him to leave, so that we can grasp and sense the hopes and thoughts of those who make a similar choice today.

Each person shall now receive a Post-it note; you can write one or more words on it, to express the hopes that inhabit the hearts of those who migrate today. What do these men, women and children hope? What do they desire?

You can allow a period of silence, in which Sting's song can be played again, while the participants write down the hopes they reflected on.

You can read the words that have been written out loud and place the Post-its on the red T-shirt.

Holy Father, you have created one people from all the different languages and nations, grant us that communion with your Son may liberate us from all forms of egoism and division, and transform us into a community of brothers united in the same spirit.

Song: Nada te turbe (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go1-BoDD7CI>)

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SECOND PHASE

A MOMENT IN HUMAN MIGRATION

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me;... ill and you cared for me.” (Mt 25,35-36)

In the Bible, the story of Ruth is a story of women, of departures, journeys, and of the experience of being foreigners. This part of the vigil is a time for listening to the thoughts that may have crossed Ruth's mind.

Before the journey, Ruth, a woman of Moab, is living with Naomi, her mother-in-law. Ruth had married one of Naomi's sons, when Naomi came to Moab to flee a famine. But now, both brothers are dead, and Ruth and Orpah, her sister-in-law, are widows. Naomi then decides to go back to the region of Bethlehem, her native land. The moment described is when Ruth and Orpah accompany Naomi at the beginning of this journey.

Her thoughts in that moment are echoes of the feelings, suffering, and questions of the men and women who must leave their homes today in search of food, protection and dignity.

Newspaper cut-out images of women of different origin are pulled out of the suitcase.

Reader 1: Ruth's thoughts

Reader 2: Thoughts and migratory pathways (excerpts from testimonies of migrants).

All: prayer

Reader 1: The memory

Those years were wonderful. The sun light kissed the wall in the house at the beginning of each day, the work in the fields on rocky land, the times of gathering.

¹ The book *Pregghiera del mare* is “a lay prayer, a story of fear and hope.” It is a letter written by a father to his son, at night, on a beach, during their escape from war-torn Syria. Memories of the past and a future of expectation and terror await them. This text helps us understand that this story concerns and involves us all.

The book *Non essere triste viaggiatore* is a collection of the stories of seven persons who migrated to Italy from faraway lands, asylum seekers helped by the reception system of Trieste. A volunteer teacher of Italian collected their stories.

The book *La frontiera* by Alessandro Leogrande (1977-2017), journalist and writer from Taranto, is a journey through the immaterial but very real threshold dividing the North and the South of the world. A border that crosses the Mediterranean Sea and African Countries, such as Libya, Greece and the Balkans and cuts across the neighbourhoods of Italian cities. “What indifference. Sometime in the future, our descendants shall ask how we could let all this happen.”

Igiaba Scego, a writer of Somali origin, was born in Italy. In her works, she reflects on the themes of identity and of dialogue among cultures and immigration.

The bread was kneaded in the evening and cooked in the oven early in the morning; the words exchanged with other women on the way to the well; the smells from the kitchen that filled the house and in autumn, the olive harvest accompanied by the chatter echoing in the fields. Life was hard, but

being together, feeling loved, the village community were my normal life. A season of daily life and love. Life with its small joys and difficulties. Then, everything changed all of a sudden. A sudden disease, my husband first, then his brother. Death. My solitude and Orpah's, my sister-in-law. Naomi's suffering, as she reached this foreign land with her two sons. She had experienced famine that had blown like a dry desert wind that withered everything and she had left. She had become a mother to me, now there was no future for her. An enormous void filled our homes. In these moments, I retrace life as if I were on the brink of a ravine: how to jump across, a sudden, unexpected, and unthought-of path. The thought of having to leave our homes is growing like a weight inside. A weight that paralyses the heart but must be addressed, if we do not want death to swallow us.

Reader 2:

“We woke in the morning / to the sound of the olive branches moved by the wind / to the bleating of granny's goats / to the noise of the pans in the kitchen. / The air was fresh and the sun rose to the East / a pale apricot-coloured stripe (...) But that life, that time, now seem like a dream / even to me, / like a buzz disappearing in the distance.²

I recall the summer nights in Konduz / We slept in the open, in the fresh courtyards / in front of our homes, under the stars. / There were always two stars / the sun at the beginning of the sky / two stars close-by like two sisters / they stood there where the sky stays blue longer.³

All:

Lord, our life and our days are in your hands. Grant us that we may understand that everybody's life is worthy of care and attention. Grant us that we may be thankful for what we live. Grant us the sensitivity to feel the suffering of those who are forced to abandon their homes and countries.

Reader 1: The present

“Go back, each of you, to your mother's house”. Naomi is good. She speaks insistently from her meek heart. She knows what it means to be a woman in a foreign land. Her life has always been about leaving: she endeavoured to listen to different sounds, not understanding what was said, she felt lost as a rootless tree, with its leaves torn by the wind. She did so for her children, she is a woman, she cares for others. Naomi was also a welcoming woman: she looked upon us with compassion, just as when she did not understand and saw her sons open up new pathways. Now she insists, she wants to be left alone in her journey, because she knows how painful migration is: “Why should you come with me?” She thinks that she cannot give us anything more. To migrate means to find oneself poor, with nothing to offer, exposed to the meanness of those who exploit, rape and steal. In that moment, she does not know all the things that she has given us with her empty hands.

² Khaled Hosseini, *Sea Prayer*, Società Editrice Milanese 2018.

³ Fateh Mohammad, born in Afghanistan arrived in Italy in 2015, in Maria Paola Mioni (edited by), *Non essere triste viaggiatore. Poesie dall'esilio*, ed. Infinito 2019, 68.

Reader 2:

“Marwan, your mother is here with us / tonight on this cold shore, / lit by the moon, among crying / children and women complaining / in languages we don’t understand. /

They are Afghans, and Somalis, Iraqis, Eritreans / and Syrians. We all impatiently await / dawn, though the thought / of that moment fills us with dread / We are looking for a new homeland.

They said that we are not welcome / that nobody invited us, and we should / take our misfortunes elsewhere.”⁴

“I left my country because of a conflict among villages that killed my father. I spent a long time in Libyan prisons, around one year in two different prisons. The traffickers sold me from one prison to the other. When I think about the prisons, I become very sad, I think that in Libya, they do not see men, but money. I had to pay a ransom so that they would not kill me, as it happened to other brothers who were with me. They tortured us every day, both in Tazirbu and Ash Shwayrif (330 km South of Tripoli, “Ed.”) In the first prison, I saw ten people die for hunger and thirst. They slashed me with water pipes, then tied me and beat me under the soles of my feet; early in the morning, they threw ice-cold water at me. My body is full of scars; I do not know whether they shall go away. At night, I often dream of my father and my dead travel companions. It is not easy.”⁵

All:

Lord, we place before you the cry of all the migrant men and women humiliated, kidnapped, beaten and raped. We bring you the cry and desperation of all the victims of torture and exploitation in the journey of migration. We bring you the cry of suffering that comes from all the forms of rejection, refusal, and injustice towards those who seek refuge.

Reader 1: An unknown future

“No, we shall return with you”: we have grown fond of Naomi. We want to accompany her in

her journey. We do not want to leave her alone. However, her words are true. There is no hope: her return is a desperate gesture, because there is no way out. There is nothing nice in abandoning one’s home. There is only a dark hole in the heart. Even at this time, Naomi finds the strength to care for others: she does not want us to become foreigners, to give rise to suspicion, to endure insults, violence, indifference, and the submission required in order to survive.

Orpah’s sudden kiss embraces Naomi and holds her in an unexpected farewell that leaves me alone with my choice. I understand Orpah, in her farewell, I see a way to share in Naomi’s

⁴ Khaled Hosseini, *Sea Prayer*, Società Editrice Milanese 2018.

⁵ H.Y. 26 years, Comoro Islands. Testimony collected at Pozzallo’s Hotspot, July 2018. Doctors for Human Rights (DHR), *La fabbrica della tortura. Report on the grave human rights violations of migrants and refugees in Libya 2014-2020*, March 2020.

suffering: it means saying yes to her insistence to brave the journey alone. She is a woman who knows how to love, because she knows how to let go, without tying anyone to her, so she turned away her face. And now, I am even more lonely in my being here in this moment, in deciding what step to make.

Reader 2:

- “1. Never set out on a journey with brothers, wives, girlfriends, and parents.
2. Only share the intention to leave with your closest friends, one or two persons.
3. On the day of departure, do not say goodbye to your loved ones, avoid making the departure harder, if not impossible.
4. Have financial resources available, from your country or from other relatives abroad.
7. Have a lot of patience, especially with other people, during the long waiting times, when faced with unexpected events.
9. Put yourself in somebody’s hands, without ever trusting them blindly.
16. Be ready for anything, also the most terrible thing.
21. Have courage.
23. For believers: pray every night to find some inner peace.
28. Do not look back.

(...)

Sinti and Dag, two Ethiopian refugees living in Rome, wrote the “twenty-eight laws of the journey”. Before leaving Addis Abeba, they did not know that they would have to comply with these laws. They only found out later...”.⁶

“To me, being Italian. . . I did not have just one answer. I had a hundred. I am Italian, but not really. I am Somali, but not really. I am a crossroads. I am a junction. A mess.”⁷

“I feel Somali when: 1) I drink cardamom, clove and cinnamon tea; 2) I say the 4 daily prayers facing Mecca; 3) I wear the *dirah*; 4) I perfume my home with incense or *unsi*; (...)

I feel Italian when: 1) I eat a sweet breakfast; 2) I visit exhibitions, museums and monuments; 3) I talk about sex, men and depression with my friends; 4) I watch movies with Alberto Sordi, Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni, Monica Vitti, Totò, Anna Magnani, Giancarlo Giannini, Ugo Tognazzi, Roberto Benigni, and Massimo Troisi; 5) I eat a 1,80 euro ice-cream with stracciatella, pistachio and coconut without whipped cream...”.⁸

⁶ Alessandro Leogrande, *La frontiera*, Feltrinelli 2015, 95-97.

⁷ Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, Loescher 2012, 159.

⁸ Igiaba Scego, *Salsicce*, in I.Mubiayi, I.Scego, G.Kuruvilla, *Pecore nere*, Laterza 2006, 29-30.

All:

God of the exodus and exile, who has walked with the oppressed in search of freedom and with the exiles who have no support, accompany our journey. Help us understand that we are foreigners and pilgrims on this earth. Make us witnesses of your liberation.

Reader 1: The choice

“Go back after your sister-in-law.” Naomi’s words are like the last lifebuoy. In this moment, I can review my steps, I can go back. Is it really possible to go back in life? Or returning maybe means leaving and departing again? Wasn’t it Naomi’s silence that taught me that being a foreigner is a condition of the heart? I discovered that I was a foreigner to myself. I discovered that it was she, the foreigner, who welcomed me first. We are not at home in any place; however, we can feel at home if we can find open-hearted guests where we only saw the profile of a terrible enemy looming in the dark... I have no supports, no anchors and no protection. The only words that come up spontaneously are: “Do not ask me to abandon you...” While Orpah was able to let go, I feel the urgency to stay. I do not want to abandon those who entrusted their lives to me: our life is a network of faces that we learn to appreciate. Her being a foreigner opens me up to welcome the future as an uncharted land, with no compass or beaten paths to follow. Advancing with hope towards a house in search of bread. Setting out on a journey is like feeling as a small boat rocked by the waves, harmless, without a name, one, one of many, only a statistical number. A journey entails risking one’s life in an abyss of water and indifference. But to me, it is like childbirth. “For wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” Discovery of a migrant God that is greater than religions. Leaving means returning everything: finding myself in the original nudity, entrusted to someone, that real, tear-stricken face that I cannot abandon. It will be difficult, impossible to ask for justice for so much injustice. You shall be the reason I live, my own risk.

Reader 2:

“I love autumn because it is the season of sadness. / I love sadness / because it is the sign of my heart. / I love my heart / because yours is inside / mine.⁹

“Yes, if I had not migrated, I wouldn’t have known the word ‘nostalgia’.

If I had not migrated, I would not have crossed the bridge between “differences”.

If I had not migrated, cultural and social values, religions and doctrines, people, the East, North, South and West would have remained prisoners in my books forever.

If I had not migrated, how could I have written about the bird in a cage, the sad autumn leaves, the black and desolate clouds, the withered flowers, the sea and the waves?

But now, I can understand life better.

If I had not migrated”¹⁰

⁹ Hedajatullah SaberJo, born in Kabul migrated to Italy, in Maria Paola Mioni (edited by), *Non essere triste viaggiatore. Poesie dall’esilio*, Infinito 2019, 34.

¹⁰ Abdullah Naderi, born in Afghanistan, migrated to Italy in 2016, in Maria Paola Mioni (edited by), *Non essere triste viaggiatore. Poesie dall’esilio*, Infinito 2019, 70.

All:

We pray to you, Lord of the streets, to open up pathways of understanding and solidarity. Grant that we may discover how we are welcomed by those who are unknowing witnesses of your welcome. Grant that we may discover your face of migrant God, who tears down our barriers and passes over any frontier.¹¹

Song: Nada te turbe (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go1-BoDD7CI>)

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¹¹ Reference texts for the second phase of the vigil:

E. Bianchi, *Ruth, il tuo Dio sarà il mio Dio*, in Id., *Lontano da chi? Lontano da dove?* Gribaudi 1977. A. Cortesi, *La storia di Ruth: la straniera, profezia del Dio dei poveri*, in Id., *Di fronte allo straniero*, Nerbini 2011, 63-90.

L. Maggi, *Le donne di Dio. Pagine bibliche al femminile*, Claudiana 2014, 73-82.

C. Mesters, *Rut. Una storia della Bibbia*, Cittadella 1986.

D. Scaiola, *Rut*, Paoline 2009.

M. Semeraro, *Rut. Donna altra*, La Meridiana 2007.

J.L. Ska, *La storia di Ruth la Moabita e il diritto di cittadinanza in Israele*, in Id., *Il libro sigillato e il libro aperto*, Dehoniane 2005, 369-390.

THIRD PHASE

THE PRAYER OF SEPARATION

“Says the Lord: “I know well the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare, not your woe!... when you call me I will listen to you... I will gather you together from all the nations and all the places to which I have banished you”. (Jer, 29, 11.12.14)

The photo of an ID card or the photo of a residency permit is pulled out of the suitcase

Prayer of the suitcase. A new version of psalm 137 (reading and video available here: <https://youtu.be/GILoWXrYToM>)

We had been lying there, useless and forgotten, on the shelves of a police office. Suitcases left unattended by those who, in order to avoid checks, had to abandon their suitcases and give up their few essential belongings, the few memories they had put aside for their journey of hope.

I cry out of nostalgia and sorrow, remembering that distant land that I left. A barren land, a land dried up by poverty and unable to feed its children. A land without the strong, who try their luck to build a better future and help the families they left behind.

I remember when the journey started. I recall the hugs, the promises, and recommendations. The worry in the mothers' eyes, the fear of not seeing those children again.

I recall the pleasant weight of a tired body on mine. I can still feel its warmth, while I caress the wounds on my case, a fighter's scars.

I left full of trust, certain of the new home where I could rest with my travel companion and our few essential belongings entrusted to me; but now, I am deceived, frustrated and worried about the fate of the one who had been entrusted to me.

Where will he be? In a temporary holding facility, waiting for repatriation, in one of the too many legal prisons, where rights are denied? Or in some no-man's land, waiting to cross the umpteenth border? Did he end up in the hands of criminal associations, forced to work for little money or worst, dead, thrown somewhere, with no one to mourn him?

May all of my joints rust if I forget him, his smile and the dreams he told me about.

And now, forgotten in an office, I listen to voices I do not understand, languages with hard, foreign sounds.

But you, Lord, remember when our journey came to an abrupt end; when the borders became walls and he was stopped, locked up and I, deposited on these shelves.

Remember, Lord, those bureaucrats and their briefcases, fear-laden briefcases, full of documents that deny us asylum and welcome.

Remember the scorn of officers, people's judging looks, when at a loss, my travel companion implored to be welcomed. Remember the lies they told him to calm him down, promising they would listen to him, while they locked him up in a police van.

Do not forget those who offered us a blanket, a sandwich or even only a smile of encouragement despite their fatigue. Multiply your blessings on their families. And spread that seed of goodness as a seed that grows in the desert.

CONCLUSION

*The Lord is your guardian;
The Lord is your shade at your right hand;
By day, the sun cannot harm you;
Nor the moon by night.
The Lord will guard you from all evil,
and will always guard your life.
The Lord will guard your coming and going
Both now and forever.*

(From Psalm 121)

Our Sea who art not in heaven,

And embrace the borders of the island

and the world, hallowed be thy salt,

hallowed be thy sea bed,

Welcome the overcrowded boats

that follow no road on the sea surface

the fishermen fishing out at night,

their nets among your creatures,

returning from their trip in the morning with their catch

of saved castaways.

Our Sea who art not in heaven,

At dawn you are the colour of wheat

at dusk, that of grape and harvest.

We have scattered in you more drowned people than

Any other storm.

Our Sea who art not in heaven,

You are fairer than the land

also when you lift up waves as high as walls

and then let them crash down as a blanket.

Protect lives, the visits that fell

Like leaves on an avenue,

Act as autumn for them,

**Caress them, embrace them, kiss them on the forehead, as
a mother and father would before their departure (Erri
De Luca)**

Song: Nada te turbe (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go1-BoDD7CI>)

The final blessing can be given by standing up at the end, as a sign of readiness to set out and accompany the journey of those who experience the exhaustion, hope, sorrow, and anxiety of migration.

Let us pray

Lord, Father of all humankind,

No one is a foreigner to you,

No one is excluded from your fatherhood;

Look lovingly upon refugees and exiles,

The victims of segregation,

And abandoned and harmless children,

So that they may be given the warmth of a home and a homeland, And we may receive a sensitive and generous heart to open to the Poor and oppressed.

Father, who sent your Son

To share in our endeavours and hopes and have placed Him at the centre of life and history,

Generously look to those who migrate along the roads of the world, So that they may find the fraternal solidarity, which is freedom, Peace and justice in your love.

We ask you through Christ our Lord

Amen