



World Refugee Day

Fr Alan Hilliard reflects on the recent letter of Pope Francis to mark World Refugee Day on Sunday, 29 September.

There is a story told of a man who presented to a doctor in a hospital with various symptoms including rashes and a soaring temperature. The doctor enquired further from the patient in an attempt to find out the underlying problem. We all wonder at times if the symptoms presenting in us are all that has to be treated or whether the symptoms are indications that something more sinister, as yet unknown, has to be looked at. Having got results from blood tests and various smears and now having evidence to suspect a more serious condition the doctor told the man they were going to place him in a special unit at the far end of the hospital. The doctor drew in a deep breath and said, 'and we'll be feeding you on pancakes'. 'Pancakes', the man replied, 'will they aid my recovery?' 'No', replied the doctor, 'they are the only things we can fit under the door!'

This story may not be what one would expect to be reading as an introduction to Pope Francis's letter for the 105th World Day for Migrants and Refugees which takes place on the



29 September 2019 so let me explain further. Firstly, Pope Francis looks on migration like a doctor looks at symptoms. An incompetent doctor would treat the symptoms without looking at what might be causing the problem. On a first visit the doctor could be excused for a lack of attention to detail but if the symptoms persist and the patient returns then the doctor has to look again. This is why the pope underlines that issues surrounding the plight of migrants and refugees 'are not just about migrants' but about all situations of oppression and poverty.

If the situation of migrants is a



If the situation of migrants is a symptom of the world's problems then looking beyond their plight reveals a world that is basically falling apart.

a part of ourselves that we may keep hidden because it is not well regarded nowadays. (Pope's letter)

This story also shows how convenient it is at times to lock problems away. Every phase of history in nearly every culture, have places where people are locked away. We know this only too well in Ireland. At times it was convenient to blame the Church on all the problems but it was society at large, including the Church, that colluded with these institutions. Despite our past we still continue this practice today. Many migrants and refugees fall victim to attitudes and understandings that make us feel better, different and superior to them to the extent that we can discard others. The letter reminds us to examine what we do today because we bear responsibility for today; and what we do today plans for what tomorrow may look like. Looking at the past and blaming others distracts us from what is our duty in these moments.

Anyone who does not fall within the accepted norms of physical, mental and social well-being is at risk of marginalization and exclusion. (Pope's Letter). ❤️

to be continued

symptom of the world's problems then looking beyond their plight reveals a world that is basically falling apart. He says that today it may be the migrant that is expendable, but tomorrow it will be you and me as people struggle to get a foot on the ladder of security, trying to access housing, what one might consider a living wage and a chance to improve opportunities for themselves and their families.

When we show concern for them, we also show concern for ourselves, for everyone; in taking care of them, we all grow; in listening to them, we also give voice to