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"How can we welcome others?"

In his 27 September general audience, Pope Francis spoke about his recent apostolic journey to Marseille for the “Rencontres Méditerranéennes.”

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Dear brothers and sisters!

I went to Marseille at the end of last week to participate in the conclusion of the *Rencontres Méditerranéennes* (Mediterranean Meetings), which

involved Bishops and mayors from the Mediterranean area, along with numerous young people, so that their outlook would be open to the future. In fact, the event that took place in Marseille was called “Mosaic of Hope.” This is the dream, this is the challenge: that the Mediterranean might recover its vocation, that of being a *laboratory of civilization and peace*.

As we know, the Mediterranean is the cradle of civilization and a cradle is for life! It is not tolerable that it become a tomb, neither should it be a place of conflict. The Mediterranean Sea is the complete opposite of the clash between civilizations, war, human trafficking. It is the exact opposite because the Mediterranean is a means of communication between Africa, Asia, and Europe; between the north and the south, the east and the west, persons and cultures, peoples and

tongues, philosophies and religions. Of course, the sea is always an abyss to overcome in some way, and it can even become dangerous. But its waters safeguard treasures of life; its waves and its winds carry vessels of all types.

From its eastern shore, two thousand years ago, the Gospel of Jesus Christ departed. Of course, this [the proclamation of the Gospel] does not happen magically, neither is it accomplished once and for all. It is the fruit of a journey in which each generation is called to travel a piece, reading the signs of the times in which it lives.

The meeting in Marseille comes after similar meetings that took place in Bari in 2020, and in Florence last year. It was not an isolated event, but a step forward on the itinerary that began with the “Mediterranean Colloquia” organized by Giorgio La

Pira, the Mayor of Florence, at the end of the 1950s. It is a step forward to respond today to the appeal launched by Saint Paul VI in his Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, to promote "a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others" (n. 44).

What came out of the Marseille event? What came out is an outlook on the Mediterranean that I would call simply *human*, not ideological, not strategic, not politically correct nor instrumental; no, human, that is, capable of referring everything to the primary value of the human person and his or her inviolable dignity. Then, at the same time, a *hopeful* outlook came out. Today, this is surprising– when you hear testimonies from those who have lived through inhuman situations, or who have shared them, and they

themselves give you a “profession of hope.” And also a *fraternal* outlook.

Brothers and sisters, this hope, this fraternity must not “evaporate;” no, rather, it needs *to be organized*, concretized through long, medium and short-term actions so that people, in complete dignity, can *choose to emigrate or not to emigrate*. The Mediterranean must be a message of hope.

But there is another complementary aspect: *hope* needs *to be restored to our European societies*, especially to the new generations. In fact, how can we welcome others if we ourselves do not first have a horizon open to the future? How can young people, who are poor in hope, closed in on their private lives, worried about managing their own precariousness, open themselves to meeting others and to sharing? Our societies, many times sickened by individualism, by

consumerism and by empty escapism, need to open themselves, their souls and spirits need to be oxygenized, and then they will be able to read the crisis as an opportunity and deal with it positively.

Europe needs to *retrieve passion and enthusiasm*. And I can say that I found passion and enthusiasm in Marseille: in its Pastor, Cardinal Aveline; in the priests and consecrated persons; in the faithful laity dedicated to charity, to education; in the People of God who showed great warmth during the Mass in the *Vélodrome* Stadium, I thank all of them and the President of the Republic, whose presence testified that all of France was paying attention to the event in Marseille. May Our Lady, whom the people of Marseille venerate as *Notre Dame de la Garde*, accompany the journey of the peoples of the Mediterranean so

that this region might become what it has always been called to be – a mosaic of civilization and hope.

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