

## PRAYER FOCUS FOR MONTH OF OCTOBER 2015

### *Refugee Crisis*

The Prayer Focus for this month is a call to a compassionate response to the refugee crisis.



### REFLECTION ONE

*'Imagine being uprooted from the life you know – leaving your home, your possessions, and your whole way of life. Think of what it would be like to leave family members behind or to lose them in a journey with an uncertain end and in the hands of strangers. Leaving your country for good is one of the hardest decisions a person can be forced to make. It means a break with all that you know.'* (Social Justice Statement, September 2015)

It is easy to become overwhelmed with numbers so that our hearts become insensitive to the human face of the refugee tragedy. We read that:

- \* ...in 2014 there were almost 60 million people who had been displaced because of persecution, conflict or violence.
- \* Four million people, nearly a fifth of Syria's population, has fled the country since the war began in 2011.
- \* Each day, conflict and persecution force more than 42,000 people to flee their homes in search of safety and protection.' (Social Justice Statement, 2015)

In the midst of all these figures, let us pause to hear the voice of one Syrian refugee, Ziah Ramadan. *'I fled from Aleppo after planes dropped barrel bombs around my home. Our building was destroyed and whole families were killed. There were rivers of blood in the streets'* (The Guardian Sept 8, 2015)

Perhaps it took an image as distressing as that of little Aylan Kurdi washed up on the beach in Turkey to humanise the indifference that was creeping into our world. It forced us to look when all our instincts are to look away and to say that it is ‘over there’, and not really our concern. Nilufer Demir, the Turkish photographer who took these photos said: ‘This is the only way I can express the scream of his silent body’. (The Guardian, September 6, 2015)

Can we hear the scream of little Aylan’s silent body and the thousands of others drowning or being killed in warfare?

At this critical time in world history, we are being called to a change of heart. ‘Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts. (Colossians 3: 12)

Pope Francis has made his challenge very concrete:

“May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary of Europe, take in one family,” he said. For Catholics, offering shelter to a refugee family would be seen as a “concrete act of preparation” for the Jubilee Year of Mercy beginning in December. (September 6, 2015)

As followers of the compassionate Jesus, and friends of Catherine McAuley, may we take these words to heart and find welcome in our hearts for the suffering people of Syria.



**Let us pray for all asylum seekers:**

**Compassionate God, no one is a stranger to you  
and no one is ever far from your loving care.  
In your kindness watch over refugees and asylum seekers,  
those separated from their loved ones, those who are lost,  
and those who have been exiled from their homes.  
Bring them safely to the place where they long to be,  
and help us always to show your kindness to strangers and those in need.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord,  
who too was a refugee and migrant  
who travelled to another land searching for a home.  
Amen.**

(Adapted from the Opening Prayer of the Mass for Refugees and Exiles)

## REFLECTION TWO

### Compassion for asylum seekers

Pope Francis, challenges us to *'look into the face of the asylum seeker and really hear their story so that they are no longer a stranger to be feared and we can no longer be indifferent to their need.'* (Sept 6, 2015)



Let us pause to hear the story of the cry of the poor in the words of the Kenyan-born Somali-British poet Warsan Shire:

*'No one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark.  
You only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well.  
You only leave home  
when home won't let you stay.  
You have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land.  
No one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled  
means something more than journey.  
No one crawls under fences,  
no one wants to be beaten, pitied.  
No one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching,*

**or prison  
because prison is safer  
than a city of fire  
I want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a shark.  
Home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore.'**



Let us continue to pray then, this month, for refugees, not only those fleeing Syria, but also those in detention centres in Australia, Manus Island and Nauru, so that in our words and actions, we can reflect the loving mercy of Jesus who challenges us with these words. 'I was a stranger and you took me in' (Matthew 25.35)

May our lives show that *'the foreigner residing among you be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.'* (Leviticus 19:34)  
With people all around the world let us pray:

**Help us form the words  
'Sister' and 'Brother'  
as we greet those who seek refuge in our land.**

**Let us remember that,  
with your grace,  
there are enough loaves and fishes  
to go around  
if we come together  
as your family.**

**Give us the courage  
and the compassion  
to respect the rights of all  
in this country of abundance,  
to embrace all in  
the name of your love.  
Amen**

(Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre.)