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Francis prays for refugees and migrants

Dennis Coday | Nov. 4, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

Pope Francis offered special prayers for migrants and refugees who have died in their flights seeking freedom and economic justice. The prayers were offered Nov. 1, the Feast of All Saints, at the end of his evening Mass at Rome's Verano cemetery [1].

?I would like to pray especially for our brothers and sisters who have died seeking freedom, a more worthwhile life," he said.

On July 8, Pope Francis devoted his first trip outside Rome to Lampedusa [2] , an Italian island in the southern Mediterranean that serves as a major point of arrival for immigrants from Africa and the Middle East seeking to reach Europe. More than 20,000 people are believed to have perished over the last decade making the 70-mile crossing.

He spoke movingly of the pressures that force people to leave their homes and condemning what he called a "globalization of indifference" to migrants. That day, Francis tossed a wreath of yellow and white chrysanthemums into the sea to commemorate those who died making the passage.

Tragedy was repeated Oct. 3, when a boatload packed with more than 500 Eritrean men, women and children capsized off Lampedusa and caught fire, with just 155 survivors and 364 dead bodies recovered. The incident made global headlines, partly because of Francis recent visit to the island.

In the cemetery Nov. 1, Francis alluded to the Lampedusa tragedy -- and perhaps to the tragedies seen in North America, where refugees die in the Sonora Desert [3]as they try to enter the United States from Mexico.

Francis said, "We have seen the photographs depicting the cruelty of the desert; we have seen the sea where many have drowned. Let us pray for them. And let us also pray for the survivors, who now languish in shelters, in the hope that the necessary legal procedures will be completed swiftly so that they might move on to other more comfortable places, in other centers.?

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