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At the vigil on 12 August, the Bishop of the Diocese of Coimbra, Virgílio Antunes, said that the equal dignity of all is still a dream yet to be realised.

The reality of forced migration and the dramatic experiences of refugees and exiles were particularly highlighted in the homily that Bishop Virgílio Antunes gave to the pilgrims at the Shrine of Fatima during the vigil held on 12 August.

Invited to preside over the International Anniversary Pilgrimage, which is part of the National Pilgrimage for Migrants and Refugees, the Bishop of the Diocese of Coimbra said that “among the shadows that darken individuals and peoples, the dramatic experience of refugees and exiles, due to war, hunger, persecution, injustice, totalitarian policies and inhuman living conditions, stands out today”.

For Bishop Virgílio Antunes, “the fact that similar phenomena have occurred throughout history does not diminish the magnitude of the problem or the responsibility of the human community”. On the contrary, the Bishop of Coimbra argues that the responsibility is greater because of the negative experiences of the past.

The President of the pilgrimage regretted that in some areas there are “many setbacks”, and added that we can no longer consider the experience of migrants and refugees as an unknown reality. He recalled that in Portugal, Europe and many other

places in the world, the phenomenon of forced migration is well known, not only through the media, but also through personal and direct experience. He gave the following examples: “We have neighbours who are refugees and exiles, we work with them, we meet them in the same church pews and hospital wards, children sit at the same desks in classrooms and play in the same school playgrounds.”

Drawing on Sacred Scripture, he emphasised that “for God there are no foreigners, but only men and women who walk the earth, some perhaps benefiting from the possibilities of a peaceful life and normal conditions for their pilgrimage, and others fleeing the past and longing for a happier present and future. For God there are no foreigners, only sons and daughters.”

Mgr. Virgílio Antunes recalled the content of the first reading, taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, to affirm the rights of the foreigner and the poor, and to affirm that the equal dignity of all “is still a dream to be realised”.

Starting from the Gospel, the Bishop of Coimbra shared his conviction that “in Fatima, we ask for no other miracle than that of love and brotherhood between peoples, knowing that it is a gift from God and the fruit of our prayer and conversion”.

Some 45,000 pilgrims took part in the celebrations on 12 August in the prayer area. There were two groups from Portugal and 21 from other countries: Germany (2), Belgium (1), Côte d'Ivoire (1), Spain (4), Philippines (1), Ireland (2), Italy (2), Malta (1), Poland (3), Senegal (1), Sri Lanka (1), Vietnam (2). Three bishops and 59 priests also took part in the evening's celebrations.

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