



*To the Reverend Thomas H. Smolich, SJ  
International Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service*

As the Jesuit Refugee Service celebrates the fortieth anniversary of its founding by the Servant of God Pedro Arrupe, I ask you to convey my cordial best wishes to those gathered at the Astalli Centre here in Rome, and to all JRS staff and volunteers throughout the world. My thoughts turn also in a special way to the many men, women and children who seek refuge and assistance from JRS. May they and their families always know that the Pope remains close to them and is praying for them!

As you seek to renew and deepen your commitment to serving the varied and complex needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, I pray that all of you will continue to draw encouragement and wisdom from the vision and example of your founder.

Father Arrupe translated his shock at the suffering of those fleeing their homeland in search of safety as a result of the war in Vietnam into a deeply practical concern for their physical, psychological and spiritual welfare. This profoundly Christian and Ignatian desire to care for the wellbeing of all who find themselves in utter desperation has inspired and guided the work of JRS for the past forty years, from its beginnings with the Vietnamese boat people in the early 1980s, to the present day, when the coronavirus pandemic has made it clear that the entire human family is “in the same boat”, facing unprecedented economic and social challenges (cf. *Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in Time of Epidemic*, 27 March 2020).

Indeed, all too many people in today’s world are forced literally to cling to rafts and dinghies in an attempt to seek refuge from the viruses of injustice, violence and war. Faced with such grave inequalities, JRS has a key role to play in raising awareness of the plight of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Yours is the vital task of extending the hand of

friendship to those who are lonely, separated from their families, or even abandoned, accompanying them and giving them a voice, especially by providing them with opportunities to grow through educational and development programmes. Your witness to God's love in serving refugees and migrants, moreover, is essential for building that "culture of encounter" (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 30) which alone can provide the basis for authentic and enduring solidarity for the sake of our human family (cf. *ibid.*, 216-217).

As you look to the future, I am confident that no setback or challenge, whether personal or institutional, will distract or discourage you from responding generously to this urgent call to promote the culture of closeness and encounter through your resolute advocacy of those whom you accompany each day.

With these sentiments, I renew my prayerful good wishes for your work and ask you also to remember me in your own prayers. Entrusting all associated with the apostolate of JRS to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of Hope and Comfort of Migrants, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in Christ our Lord.

Rome, Saint John Lateran  
4 October 2020

Francis