

Jesus was a refugee, pope says on world migration day

VATICAN CITY - Jesus was a refugee - a fact that should be remembered as societies deal with modern issues of emigration and immigration, Pope Benedict XVI said.

“Migration today sometimes is voluntary and at other times, unfortunately, is forced by wars or persecution, often in dramatic conditions,” the pope said Jan. 16. From its very beginnings, the church has taken an interest in these situations, he said.

“The parents of Jesus had to flee their own land and take refuge in Egypt, in order to save the life of their child: the Messiah, the son of God, was a refugee,” he said.

Throughout the centuries, he said, Christian populations have at times suffered the necessity to leave their homelands, impoverishing the countries where they and their ancestors had lived.

On the other hand, the pope said, the voluntary migration of Christians through the ages has increased the church’s missionary dynamism and ensured that the witness of faith reaches new frontiers.

The pope made the remarks at the Vatican on a day that was celebrated in most countries as the World Day for Migrants and Refugees. Late last year, he issued a message on the theme of this year’s celebration, “One Human Family.”

The pope said he wanted his message to underline that in the church’s vision, human migration has a unifying goal: to form a single human family that is enriched by differences but that lives without barriers.