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A mass of yellow and white flowers clumped together floats in dark-colored water

A wreath of flowers thrown by Pope Francis floats in the Mediterranean Sea in the waters off the Italian island of Lampedusa in this July 8, 2013, file photo. The pope threw the wreath to honor the memory of immigrants who have died trying to cross from Africa to reach a new life in Europe. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Mourning the "silent massacres" of innocent people who died while crossing the Mediterranean Sea seeking a better life elsewhere, the world must change its attitude toward migrants and those in need, Pope Francis said.

"The brother who knocks at the door deserves love, hospitality and every care," the pope said in a letter marking the tenth anniversary of his first apostolic journey as pope to the Italian island of Lampedusa July 8, 2013. "He is a brother who, like me, has been placed on earth to enjoy what exists there and to share it in communion."

Lampedusa, which lies between Sicily and the northern African nations of Tunisia and Libya, has been for decades a major destination point for migrants from Africa,

the Middle East and Asia seeking a new life in Europe. However, many migrants often make the journey in unsafe vessels or without needed provisions like food, water and floatation devices.

At least 2,000 people are believed to have lost their lives in 2022 and again in 2021 while crossing the Mediterranean. Nearly 26,000 people were recorded dead between 2014 and 2022, and, between 2014 and 2018, about 12,000 people who drowned were never found, according to Statista. Francis mourned the deaths during his 2013 visit with prayers and by tossing a floral wreath into the rippling water.

In his letter to Archbishop Alessandro Damiano of Agrigento, Sicily, the pope said he wanted to visit the people of Lampedusa "to express my support and paternal closeness to those who, after painful ordeals, at the mercy of the sea, landed on your shores." The Vatican published the letter July 8.

"We are witnessing the repetition of grave tragedies in the Mediterranean, we are shocked by the silent massacres before which we still remain helpless and stunned. The death of innocents, mainly children, in search of a more serene existence, far from wars and violence, is a painful and deafening cry that cannot leave us indifferent," he wrote.

"The occurrence of such inhuman disasters must utterly shake our consciences," he wrote. "We must change our attitude" and "we are all called to a renewed and profound sense of responsibility, showing solidarity and sharing."

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"It is therefore necessary for the church, in order to be truly prophetic, to make a diligent effort to set out on the paths of the forgotten, coming out of herself, soothing with the balm of fraternity and charity the bleeding sores of those who bear the same wounds of Christ imprinted on their own bodies," the pope wrote.

He urged Christians "not to remain imprisoned by fear and partisan logic, but to be Christians capable of replenishing this island" with the "spiritual richness of the Gospel, so that it may once again shine in its original beauty."

The pope also marked Sea Sunday July 9 after praying the Angelus with visitors in St. Peter's Square. The international day of prayer for seafarers and their families,

workers in the maritime industry, chaplains and volunteers with the apostolate of the sea was officially established in 1975 to raise awareness of the importance of the work performed by seafarers, who today number more than one million people.

Francis thanked all those at sea "who protect the oceans from various forms of pollution -- in addition to their work -- and remove from the ocean the garbage that we throw into it, the plastic."

"I would also like to gratefully remember all who work for Mediterranea Saving Humans for saving migrants in the sea," he said.

The NGO brings individuals and associations together to save migrants in distress at sea with its own civilian rescue ship. Francis has invited the group's "head of mission," Luca Casarini, to attend the Oct. 2023 synod on synodality at the Vatican as one of eight non-voting "special guests."