



M.

The
McAuley
Catholic High School
and Sixth Form
DONCASTER

Freedom?

MARCH
i87

STOP THE BOATS

M. March i87

'Freedom' according to the catechism of the Catholic Church is;

Freedom and Responsibility

1731 **Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. By free will one shapes one's own life.**

Hope. When we arrived in Calais, we headed to 'Secours Catholique'. This is a charity that works against poverty and supports the most vulnerable in and around France and overseas. The place they have is like a community centre, where refugees can go during the day. They can charge phones, have haircuts, wash clothes, pray and play games. It was daunting at first as we weren't sure what it was going to be like and how to interact with them. However, they were very welcoming and were tried to converse with us even if there English wasn't there best. We donated some hats to the charity, which they were grateful for. Many volunteer, for example, we met this woman (a medical professional) who draws portraits of some of the people and she was amazing. She started doing it in 2019 and has completed 18 A3 booklets and all her drawings are hung up on the walls as a way to remember them. We spoke to some of the volunteers, and they explained some of systems that are in place in Calais and how difficult it can be. There was a real sense of community between them.



Jessica After we left the distribution we headed to the town centre, to meet with Fr Philippe. We were invited into his home by asylum seekers who were given refuge in his home. We followed them into their kitchen where we sat around a large table with Fr. and them and got an understanding of their plight. We got back in the bus to the local church for Mass. The community made us feel welcome and even though we didn't quite understand, they made an effort to help us and invited us to say the 'Our Father' in English with the congregation. After the service had ended, we returned to Fr Philippe's home. We were greeted by a meal which had been prepared

by the asylum seekers. Everybody sat down and ate with us, while we talked and discussed their lives. They were very eager to get to know us and what brought us to Calais. They were very grateful for that they had a roof over their heads and for the people who cared for them. We learned about Father Philippe's work for refugees and asylum seekers: he spent time on hunger strike as a protest for their rights, to help bring them peace. He had set up three homes around Calais where anyone who is seeking asylum in France is welcome to stay.

Charlotte We spent some time in the 'Care 4 Calais' warehouse where we were introduced to a handful of people who had come out to Calais to volunteer as well as the wonderful leaders of this organisation and how we could help out. Our first task was to build and check donated tents to ensure they were suitable for distribution. We cleaned and organised all of the equipment we took out to the Asylum seekers sites in the afternoon.

This was followed by lunch and an afternoon briefing explaining to us about the of the kind of people we would meet and how we should act around them. Entering the site, to begin with we were all a bit cautious and stayed together in our group. We were all assigned different tasks while we were out in the sites, most of our jobs started with distribution. Care 4 Calais distributes donated items every other day starting with what they feel is the most necessary for the refugees at that point. On Saturday we were distributing boots. While distribution was taking place we met so many of the refugees many of which had come from Syria, Iran, Sudan and Afghanistan. Everyone was so polite and grateful, and were in great spirits for people in their situation. Other volunteers were cutting the refugees' hair, teaching them how to speak English, helping them charge their phones and playing games with them. We all noticed the sense of community between all of these strangers. One of the most important things we did was hand out leaflets to all of the migrants with information, in several different languages, explaining how to get legal help if they make it to the UK. Later we saw that many had been thrown away, thinking it a government scam to send them to Rwanda. Making our way back to the mini bus after 5 hours we passed a couple of refugees using flattened cardboard as prayer mats to say their evening prayers.

Next day, we visited a different site but we could immediately tell that it would be more harrowing than the previous day's visit. None of the migrants had any spirit left in them. A few told us their sleeping bags had been stolen while they were sleeping. Others told us their family were starving and needed food. We listened about where they had come from and why they had left; The desperation was immense; begging for food and coming back for multiple cups of tea. Many were only wearing flip flops. We were surprised by the number of teenage boys we met who had fled their countries. Some organisations specifically help minors who need housing. It was incredibly eye opening to hear and witness the journey they've taken and are still taking now, all so they can just be safe. This truly was the most amazing experience.

Pope Francis' Prayer for Migrants

Merciful God, we pray to you for all the men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life.

Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished.

May we never forget them, but honour their sacrifice with deeds more than words. We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.

Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through our tenderness and protection.

In caring for them may we seek a world where none are forced to leave their home and where all can live in freedom, dignity and peace.

Merciful God and Father of all, wake us from the slumber of indifference, open our eyes to their suffering, and free us from the insensitivity born of worldly comfort and self-centredness.

Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters.

May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.

Amen

