Human Dignity and Solidarity—Immigration Ministry

NATIONAL MIGRATION WEEK TOOLKIT

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF WELCOME

January 6–12, 2019
A caravan is a group of travelers, journeying together for safety and fellowship, seeking a clear destination of hope, promise and prosperity. This was clearly the purpose of the Magi, the Three Kings, as they followed a common dream to seek out and find the promised Christ, the King of the Universe, the Source and Summit of all life-giving love. And were they not surprised to find the Christ in a cave, a stable for housing and feeding animals, and to find the Holy Child himself lying in a manger, a feeding trough? And were they not then able, when peering into the eyes of this child, to see the very Source of their own being, to witness to the incredible mystery of God’s love, manifested in both a vast and glorious universe and in a fragile helpless child wrapped in swaddling? And, in this encounter with Pure Love, were they not transformed themselves, moved to share their gifts, and excited to go home to share the witness of their encounter with the Holy Child?

Today there are caravans of people—mothers, fathers, children—seeking a destination of hope, promise and prosperity in countries willing to welcome them. In many cases, they flee war and oppression. Those who make their way from Central America to the U.S. are often fleeing violence and the all too real danger of death. They are fleeing the threats of gangs who are able to prosper because the demand for drugs in the U.S. is so high. Some are fleeing because there are no legal jobs, nothing to sustain their families. What parent would not do everything in their power to assure that their spouse and children are safe and provided for? And they come, not for a handout, but for a hand to help them up so that they can offer their gifts of labor, creativity, faith and culture to the communities in which they will live.

Today there are caravans of Catholic Christians journeying together as members of parishes and as clusters of parishes, joined in fellowship, mutual support and outreach to the poor and marginalized, seeking a destination of hope, promise and prosperity in the heart of God. They find security in each other, in their sharing of the Word, in their receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, and in their common goal and desire to be the Body and Blood of Christ for their families, friends, co-workers and classmates, and for those poor and needy marginalized and oppressed by circumstance, society and the sins of others.

This week the U.S. Church celebrates National Migration week, recognizing the millions of people fleeing war, oppression, gang violence, genocide and famine to find a better life for their families. For us as Catholics, all three of these caravans merge today with one common goal: to continue our journey to seek out the One who is there to guide us, accompany us, the One who chooses us, blesses us, breaks us open to fill us with the Holy Spirit, and who then invites us to pour out our gifts—our time, talent and treasure—to help others in greater need than ourselves. We need to resist any efforts to separate, incarcerate or turn away families who are simply seeking our welcome, ready to offer their gifts to support their families, our church families and our communities. Will we welcome them?

—Rev. Larry Dowling
January 13, 2019

Baptism of the Lord

1st Reading: Isaiah 40; 1-5, 9-11
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104: 1B-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30
2nd Reading: Titus 2: 11-14; 3:4-7

With the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we come to the end of liturgical season of Christmas. After weeks of meditating on the Incarnation and celebrating the revelation of Jesus to all the nations in the Epiphany, we are now called to reflect on the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. The public, formal baptism by John who identifies Jesus as the One for whom John had been preparing the way. Additionally, the baptism of Jesus was an opportunity for God to reveal more about Jesus’ nature and work. The voice of the Father speaking from the cloud, and identifying Jesus as His son, was a clear indication to the people that Jesus was to be listened to and followed. While we now know who Jesus is, for many at the time of His baptism He was just another prophetic voice crying in the wilderness.

Part of the message of this feast is that baptism is a call to mission, to ministry, for all of us. We are to be missionary disciples, bearers of the Good News of God’s love and compassion to all. At baptism we are named as God’s sons and daughters. The Christian community, beginning in our families, then forms us to witness to what we have come to know. Missionary discipleship is not a call just for those who are priests, nuns or brothers, but for all the baptized.

We are always teaching about our faith. What are the lessons I am teaching by my life and words? If I say that I am a child of God, a disciple, can people see that in me throughout the day? We are not expected to be perfect, but we are called to daily conversion. Baptism calls us to be forgiving of others, to being compassionate, to being generous with our time and treasure, to being healers. Missionary discipleship is not getting on a soapbox or even into a pulpit. It is a manner of life. It challenges us and others to God-centered living. How we embody the beatitudes and model our life on Christ are the measures of our success.

One of the concrete ways we can express our discipleship is through our outreach to the marginalized, the excluded and isolated. At this time, this outreach needs to include, indeed show a preferential option for, the immigrant, the refugee and the victim of human trafficking. They, too, have been called by name by God. They share our common humanity and dignity. They are our brothers and sisters. It is sometimes difficult for us to fully understand the complexity of the struggles that they have faced in their journey to be free from want and from fear. But we can understand their shared human dignity and their right to move to a place that is safe, one that allows them to prosper as individuals and families. Many of us are the descendants of immigrants. It is now our chance to pay it forward to the new immigrants and do all we can to assist them as they seek to be part of a new community.

Human rights have no borders. Human dignity has no borders. Jesus in His preaching noted, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40, 45). Mahatma Gandhi said, “The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.”

On this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord we are called to reflect on our witness to our faith, our missionary discipleship. What are we doing to assist and welcome “the other,” the immigrant, the refugee, the victim of human trafficking? Imagine the transformation of the lives of those living in the shadows and in our society if all of us worked to create a culture of encounter. We’re called to see the ideal and strive to achieve it, not ask what the minimum requirements are and be satisfied if we almost make it.

—Rev. Thomas Brennan, SDB
That we may build communities of welcome in the United States especially for the refugees who need to leave their countries because of war, violence, poverty and climate change, we pray to the Lord.

That the migrants in caravans from Central America, be protected and then be respected and supported when they arrive at the border, we pray to the Lord.

That God will grasp the hands of those in the caravans so that they may have inner strength and help all those in contact with them to have respect for them, we pray to the Lord.

That the 68 million refugees who are fleeing life-threatening realities, may find safety, protection and help in our world today, we pray to the Lord.

That we may pray and help the detained children along the border, that they soon may be released to their family to whom they belong, we pray to the Lord.

That the current administration may have the wisdom to meet the children and the caravans at the border with kindness, wise and discerning action and compassion, we pray to the Lord.

For the young people who have received DACA, but now are living fear in what will happen to them, we pray to the Lord.

For families who have been separated by deportation, we pray to the Lord.

That those in authority may turn away from prejudice and fear while setting their hearts on acts of mercy for immigrant people, we pray to the Lord.

We pray that we may follow the star of hope and faith as the three Magi did in the journey with our families, we pray.

We pray that we may live our baptismal commitment by helping refugees and immigrants in our country, we pray.

We pray that we may listen to the Word of God and live it out fully by our hospitality to all in our parish, we pray.
PRAYERS

God of All Families, Cultures, and Nations you invite all of us to work together by accepting one another, appreciating one another, and valuing the gifts that each immigrant or refugee bring to us. Teach us to hold one another in love and respect. Help us to welcome and appreciate each other in our parish communities. We pray this in Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of Life and Compassion, we pray for our immigrant brothers and sisters, especially the refugees who have been uprooted from their homes and made difficult journeys to safety in other lands. Help us to see you, Jesus, in the faces of strangers, in the cries of children traveling in search a better life without conflict, war and poverty. Help us to realize that we are a people of immigrants and that many of our ancestors came to the United States to escape war and poverty. May the gifts of our Gospel values help us to reach out and recognize the strangers among us, value the gifts that they bring to us and know that in journeying together we are each enriched. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of our Journey, accompany the many immigrants and refugees who are struggling for life. May we walk with one another and support them in their journey. Help us to realize that they are truly our brothers and sisters. Be with them with your love and compassion. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Prayers by Sr. Rose Therese Nolta, SSpsS