

Human Dignity and Solidarity — Immigration Ministry

NATIONAL MIGRATION WEEK TOOLKIT

PROMOTING A CHURCH AND WORLD FOR ALL

January 5 – 12, 2020



HOMILY HELPS

January 5, 2020

The Epiphany of the Lord

1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1 - 6

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:2 - 3a, 5 - 6

Gospel: Matthew 2:1 - 12

It is currently estimated that there are 272 million international migrants globally (or 3.5% of the world's population). While the vast majority of people in the world continue to live in the country in which they were born, more people are migrating to other countries, especially those within their region. Many others are migrating to high-income countries that are further afield. Work is the major reason that people migrate internationally, and migrant workers constitute a large majority of the world's international migrants, with most living in high-income countries. Global displacement is at a record high, with the number of internally displaced individuals at over 41 million and the number of refugees at nearly 26 million.

By the end of 2018, 70.8 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. That is an increase of 2.3 million people over the previous year, and the world's forcibly displaced population remained at a record high. This includes:

- 25.9 million refugees in the world — the highest ever seen;

- 41.3 million internally displaced people; and

- 3.5 million asylum-seekers.

New displacement remains very high. One person becomes displaced every two seconds — less than the time it takes to read this sentence. That's 30 people who are newly displaced every minute. One in every 108 people globally is either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee.

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On July 19, 2019, the U.S. administration closed the door on asylum seekers from Central and South America, allowing them to apply on the Mexican side of the border. Prior to this date, asylum seekers could apply, then be transported to the safety of a relative in the United States to await their hearing date at a local Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) court. After July 19th, they now wait in line for up to two weeks for a ticket indicating a court date, waiting as long as two months and, in the meantime, having to find a way to survive in Mexico where they are subject to violence from gangs and others seeking to take advantage of their plight. What they are subject to is often what they have fled in their own countries where gangs and drug cartels have threatened them with violence and/or tortured or murdered a loved one.

The journey of the Magi is similar in some ways to the journey of many migrants today. The Magi listened and responded to a dream about fulfillment of a promise made by God himself that He would send a Savior to dwell among us who would set all people free from the scourge of death. Yes, they followed a dream. And they no doubt faced dangers along the way, travelling in a caravan to increase their safety.

The Magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What they received was the joy of coming face-to-face with God's very self, a humble child born in simplicity, yet destined to transform the world and throw open the gates of heaven to all humankind. Those migrating today also bring gifts — their talents and skills, the richness of culture and the importance of family. They also bring the gift of the need for our welcome, our help in integrating them into the rich fabric of our society. However, contrary to our faith and our own history as a nation, these modern immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers receive the "gift" of discrimination, derision, scapegoating and "you are not welcome here" policies and practices.

Epiphany is celebrated as a recognition that Jesus came, not just as a Messiah for the Chosen people, but for all people in all times and places. Initially Jesus himself thought that His mission was to the Jews alone, but over time grew into His recognition that although the Jews were God's chosen people, this did not exclude others, but actually called them as God's chosen people to a greater regard and care for *all* people, especially the "widow and the orphan," the poor and needy, the migrant and the immigrant. To be Chosen is not to be exclusionary or superior, but places a burden upon the Chosen to take responsibility for all others.

Oftentimes we as Americans see ourselves as "Chosen", special and preferred in the eyes of God. But as a blessed nation and as a blessed people, we are called to an additional responsibility of sharing those blessings with those who are fleeing poverty, war, gang violence or political and religious persecution.

Perhaps the Gift we present to the Christ today is our commitment to challenge those who would seek to discriminate against the poor, the immigrant, the refugee, the asylum seeker and all who seek a better life and to add their unique value as one of God's precious children to our nation and world. The good news: *We are all God's chosen people!* What do we choose to do with that Good News? Hoard it to ourselves to the exclusion of others, or share it as fully as possible, trusting that God will always provide for us when we risk loving beyond our own comfort levels and beyond our own prejudices and fears.

— Rev. Larry Dowling

January 12, 2020

The Baptism of the Lord

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1 - 4, 6 - 7, 21

Second Reading: Acts 10:34 - 38

Gospel: Matthew 3:13 - 17

Have you ever taken note of the first question the Church asks when we baptize a baby? The parents and godparents are all present and there is an opening dialogue. But we don't ask them, "What do you believe?" And we don't ask, "Are you willing to raise this child in the practice of the faith?" And, thank God, we don't ask if they're registered members of the parish, and we most definitely don't ask if they'd like to buy a raffle ticket.

No, the first question is: "What name have you given to this child?" It's personal, and it is familial, and perhaps best of all it's kind of a call to intimacy, right from the start. It is God's desire that each and every one of us has a personal relationship with God, and it begins in a public way at baptism. Thus it is eminently important that the Church begins Ordinary Time with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and with these Scripture readings which emphasize the importance of each Christian's dignified and personal relationship with God in Christ.

Isaiah reminds us in no uncertain terms that we have been personally chosen and that God has called, grasped and formed each and every one of us to be missionary disciples for the world. And Luke reminds us in Acts 10, God really shows no partiality, that everyone has equal access to God's powerful presence. And Matthew's Gospel is the only one of the Synoptics which shows John the Baptist having to grapple with the idea of baptizing Jesus but he does relent and allow it. Immediately following, we enter into the mystery of the heavens opening up and the voice that comes from heaven announcing, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (3:17). Of course that same scene and that same voice come back in Chapter 17, when the disciples are faltering in their faith, and Jesus takes them up to Mount Tabor where they will hear the same words with the addition of the command to "listen to him" (17:5).

For those of us who are privileged to work with immigrant people here in the United States, the words of today's feast speak deeply to our hearts. With the eyes of faith we can see that we are all equal in the sight of God, that we are all called to the same intimacy with him, and that, as the song says, "all are welcome in this place," i.e., the Church. Isaiah's call to personal intimacy with God, and God's claim that Jesus is his "beloved" remind us all that the kingdom of God cannot be limited by political posturing or by mean-spirited rhetoric about how some people are "in" and others are "out." Peter's reflection in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10) is truly an invitation to all of us to consider where we too are perhaps a bit short-sighted in our assessment of the world around us. Of course, as our bishops have stated, every country has a right to protect its borders, but the shutting down of the border and the exclusionary attitude toward brothers and sisters seeking help seems cold and even self-defeating. Our country was built on the sweat and blood of immigrant people, and all of us are sons and daughters and grandchildren of those people. It's time to open our eyes and see that!

Several years ago I took a course called "Migration and the Eucharist," and in it we studied the phenomenon of what is happening throughout the world with so many people (up to one billion) who are somehow displaced or at least not living in the same place where they were born. The question for us Christians is this: If we are a Baptismal and Eucharistic people, what does that say to us about how we need to treat our immigrant brothers and sisters? The popular song "Juntos Como Hermanos" reminds us of the truth that we are all brothers and sister, members of one Church and we are *all* on our way to the encounter with the Lord. Thanks be to God!

— Rev. Ed Shea, O.F.M.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

January 5, 2019

The Epiphany of the Lord

God of Faithfulness, be with our Church leadership to build a Church for all peoples, we pray to the Lord.

God of all, help our communities to open the gifts of the migrants so that we promote a Church and a World for all, we pray to the Lord.

God of all Light, be with those searching for a home and a place of safety, be with those who are journeying, we pray to the Lord.

God of all nations and peoples, help us to be protectors and hospitable of the refugees, the poor and the vulnerable in our midst, we pray to the Lord.

God of all graces, make us one body and spirit with those who are challenged with a lack of work, being a youth with no possibilities to study or have a future, we pray to the Lord.

God of all Nature — stars and the heavens, led us to be a people for one another, we pray to the Lord.

January 13, 2020

The Baptism of the Lord

That we may be people of both faith and compassion, respecting basic human rights and living out the love of Christ for our brothers and sisters, we pray to the Lord.

That all Catholics may join to keep alive the hope that family reunification is a reality for all immigrants in the United States, we pray to the Lord.

That people everywhere continue to advocate for basic benefits in order to promote a world for all, we pray to the world.

That we embrace all immigrants, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons...”, we pray to the Lord.

That local communities take action to welcome and protect migrant children and their families, we pray to the Lord.

That refugees, migrants and all other strangers in our midst may be integrated into our communities with their gifts and cultures, we pray to the Lord.

— Sr. Rose Therese Nolta, SSpS

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.

— Sr. Rose Therese Nolta, SSpS

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