

IMMIGRATION HOMILY BY FR. JOHN HOFFMAN

It has been several years, now, that there has been a strong movement for Comprehensive Compassionate Immigration Reform in our Country.

It is a fundamental Christian principal and core to the American values that the individual person is sacred, to be respected, and their freedom is to be defended.

Why is this so difficult to get behind this effort, to support it???

Many people are angry at the church as well as undocumented immigrants. Some say : ***The undocumented Immigrants are breaking the law and the church supports this.***

Bishop John Wester, chair of the US Bishops Committee on Migration, says:

“While we support the law that protects our borders and upholds the rule of civil law, we also have the right to work to change laws which are believed to violate basic human dignity imbued by the Creator. The broken Immigration system contributes to the exploitation of migrant workers in the work place, their abuse by ruthless smugglers, and their deaths in the desert as they seek to find work to support their families. They come illegally because there are insufficient visas under the current system to come legally. While our system only offers 5000 permanent visas for unskilled laborers to come here, the demand for their work is much higher since as many as 300,00 undocumented laborers are absorbed into the U.S workforce. Comprehensive Immigration Reform would replace illegal entry with a system based on legal presence and legal entry, thus restoring the rule of law to a chaotic system while also protecting the basic dignity and lives of our fellow brothers and sisters. “

Some claim that:

Illegal Immigration Is causing an unsustainable strain on social services and making the economy fail.

But, the IRS estimates that undocumented immigrants alone paid \$50 billion in taxes from 1996-2003. In Iowa alone they pay 50 – 77 million yearly in federal Social Security and Medicare taxes from which they will never benefit. Rather than draining state resources, undocumented immigrants are in some cases subsidizing services that only documented residents can access.

Bishop Wetser says:

“By adopting comprehensive immigration reform and providing legal status for the undocumented, the U S would receive even more income taxes and Social Security payments from immigrants, since they would be required to register with the government and pay their full share. “

Some believe that

Illegal immigrants are taking jobs of citizens, stealing resources that don't belong to them, and causing a record national debt.

But five decades of immigration data shows that foreign workers have boosted the economy, jacking up all average incomes, except for immigrant farm workers, without crowding out American laborers. Immigrants push native-born workers into better paying positions, expanding the size of the pie so unskilled Americans aren't left out.

Richard Trunka, new president of AFL & CIO said that the anti immigrants are shooting at the wrong target. He asked them if it is the immigrants who moved their plant overseas, reducing the number of jobs for natives, or if the immigrants are the ones who took away their pensions. Is it the immigrants who caused the failure of the financial industry causing the recession?

Trunka said: "Immigrants are the ones who do the hardest work, for the least amount of money, with no rights to organize or vote. They are unable to send their kids to college, and will never see social security which they pay into."

Some believe that

Religious leaders and Bishops are promoting open borders, amnesty

Again, Bishop Wester:

"The bishops' prescription for mending our broken system is to bring the 11 million undocumented out of the shadows, register them with the government, require them to pay a fine and any taxes owed and require them to learn English and work as they wait in the back of the line for a chance for citizenship. This is not amnesty with is generally defined as granting a benefit without anything in return.

"Making changes to the legal immigration system will help ease pressure on our border by taking undocumented immigrants out of the enforcement equation , freeing up law enforcement to focus upon those who are here to harm us – drug smugglers, human traffickers, and would be terrorists- and not those simply looking for a job.

"We also believe that congress should examine how the root causes of migration can be addressed, so immigrants can stay where the are and work in dignity. "

II. Why is it that highly educated, successful citizens with solid backgrounds in Catholic education and social teaching do not want to hear "facts," because they know how they feel and what they think about the issues of immigration??

Are we Victims of Fear?

Is it politically generated fear, using fear to protect greed, shifting blame with fear that closes the mind and hardens the heart?

Immigration Attorney Moises Hernandez said, "We have to be very careful of fear. I am just beginning to realize how close fear is to evil. It is so assessable, convenient. It is so pervasive."

Fear-based hatred can move like a tsunami. Forget that the terrorists who have struck us in our own country have been legal residents or actual citizens, not illegal immigrants. The illegal, undocumented or just immigrants in general are a ready target for misplaced anger and unfounded fear.

Author Kathleen Norris writes: We become immersed in our ideologies, our acceptance of the status quo. We accept simple answers that support our beliefs.

III. As trite as the question can be, it is good to ask, WWJD, what would Jesus do????
What do we have, but our faith rooted in scripture, tradition and ritual.
Actually what more do we need.

We have all heard the Biblical admonition-

"You must not oppress the stranger. You know how a stranger feels, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt. Exodus 23:9 "

And we know that Biblical justice itself calls the wealthy to help the poor.

As Catholics we are called to ultimately live by our conscience – not by an enraged conscience, but an informed conscience. Our conscience is formed by the Gospel that we listen to, that we proclaim. Living the Gospel is our life, our mandate and our core value:

"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Mt. 25: 34-35

Bishop Garcia-Siller; the Gospel teaches us that there is a way through the struggle, that we should not demonize the foreigner but we should recognize the common struggles and talents of others.

And in the Gospels Jesus said many times to those who would listen,
"Do Not Be Afraid!"

Bishop Garcia- Seller:

"There is a need for a pathway for people to live peacefully and be productive in a holistic way,

There is a need for realistic quotas,

There is a need for family unity, basic human rights of a civilized society,

There is a need for orderly process,

There is a need for compassionate, comprehensive immigration reform,

There is a need for new ways of relating to people . . .building a nation of citizens
that are treated with dignity.
Let us find the way.”

And let us pray
A prayer for Immigrant Justice

Blessed are you, Lord God,
King of all creation.
Through your goodness,
We live in this land that You have
So richly blessed.
Help us always to recognize our
Blessings come from You and
Remind us to share them with others
Especially those who come
To us today from other lands.

Help us to be generous, just, and
Welcoming as you have been
and are to us.

Amen.