

WE'RE NOT STRANGERS, JUST FRIENDS WHO HAVENT MET

February 14, 2016 (DT 26:4-10, ROM 10:8-13, LK 4:1-13)

The conversation on Immigration Reform is everywhere. Every day for the past eight days I have read a front page story on immigration reform, heard a radio news story or watched a television news piece. Sometimes all three on the same day. This Sunday we will hear a reading on migration.



Moses tells his people that they shall declare that their father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt and lived there as an alien. They shall continue "When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt" (cf DT 26: 4-8).

Thousands of years have passed and yet aliens are still maltreated and oppressed today.

The United States Bishops and the universal Catholic Church are committed to serve and advocate for immigrants. This commitment is rooted in the Gospel mandate that every person is to be welcomed by the disciple as if he or she were Christ Himself and in the right of every human being to pursue, without constraint, the call to holiness.

As people of faith we believe that "all goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive." Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope

The legitimacy of crossing borders to seek employment is reinforced in the New Evangelization. We Northern countries are also called out as participants in the practices contributing to decreased economic opportunities: "In great part a direct cause of migration, the economy is highlighted for the tensions and forms of violence related to it, and the inequality it causes within and among nations ... including the growing imbalance between the North and South in the access to and distribution of resources, as well as the damage done to creation." The New Evangelization For The Transmission Of The Christian Faith

The New Evangelization is a call from Pope Benedict XVI to each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. We proclaim the Gospel not by words but by modeling our faith, witnessing to the ends of the earth, and comforting all those who are burdened. "A Christian life lived with charity and faith is the most effective form of evangelization." U.S. Catholic bishops, Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization

Immigration is not just a story in the news; it is the story of the migrants and immigrants in our parishes and in our communities. Many are burdened. Many are oppressed. What is our response?

In this Year of Faith Pope Benedict reminds us of our opportunity to "put into practice the word of the Lord, who came to proclaim deliverance from oppression." St. John the Apostle wrote: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Deliverance from oppression includes our Churches finding ways to increase our cooperation for the benefit those who arrive and of those who, on their journey, stand in need of encountering the merciful face of Christ in the welcome given to one's neighbor. The Church - priests, religious and lay people - plays a crucial role in the demanding itinerary of the new evangelization in the context of migration.

Deliverance from burden includes Christian communities paying special attention to migrant workers and their families by accompanying them with prayer, solidarity and Christian charity; by fostering new political, economic and social planning that promotes respect for the dignity of every human person, the safeguarding of the family, access to dignified housing, to work and to welfare.

When the conversation on Comprehensive Immigration Reform is everywhere, we have an immediate opportunity to fostering a new political structure, thus eliminating the oppression, the burdens and the maltreatments that immigrants suffer today and be in solidarity with the friends we have not yet met.

The U.S. Bishops have supported changing the existing political structures for years. "The Gospel mandate to "welcome the stranger" requires Catholics to care for and stand with immigrants, both documented and undocumented, including immigrant children. Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2007, 83

The Bipartisan Framework for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, however, does not go far enough. Here is a summary of the USCCB's concerns:

1. Root Causes of Migration Not Addressed. The USCCB feels that it is important to mention the root causes of migration in any immigration reform legislation and to also seek long-term solutions to these problems.

2. The Connection between Completion of Enforcement Measures and Earning a Green Card is Unclear. The USCCB would prefer a path to citizenship that is not conditional to the completion of border enforcement measures.

3. There Too Are Many Requirements to Achieve both Probationary Legal Status and Green Cards and the Requirements Discriminate Against Individuals Who Worked in the Cash Economy. The USCCB favors: (1) the use of less factors to determine probationary legal status and earning a green card, and (2) factors that are more friendly to low-skilled workers who have worked in America's cash economy.

4. Workers Need to Be Able to Petition for Immediate Family Members to Receive Status. The USCCB believes it is necessary to include a provision that allows for workers to petition for their immediate families and to ensure that these family members have a process by which to earn citizenship.

5. Due Process Protections for Immigrants Not Addressed. The USCCB advocates for the restoration of due process protections to immigrants which were eliminated with the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.

