

“I Was a Stranger and You Took Me In.”

By Regina McCarthy, OP (Saint Catharine, Kentucky)

In her recent article “Contemplation Enables Us to be Preachers Who Do Justice,” Mary Ann Wiesemann-Mills, OP, challenged us to go through the whole world as living proclamations of the Gospel. Today, with this challenge in mind, I ask you to take a look at the world of the immigrant people of the United States and decide how best we can proclaim the Gospel on their behalf.

First, perhaps we need to reflect on our own histories that have carried us to our present realities. It would be well to reflect on the truth that by far the greatest majority of us are products of immigrant families. Perhaps our ancestors came many generations ago, but they did indeed come from countries like Ireland, England, France, Poland, Russia Germany, Italy and other countries from the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Perhaps we have heard bits and pieces of their stories. Or, perhaps their stories have been mostly forgotten. We can be assured that they had good reason to come and make their home in a new world.

Having reflected on our own history, we should be able to refocus on the realities of the world of the present day immigrants while we turn to the scriptures and reflect on God’s words of caution as found in the book of Leviticus (19: 34): “...treat the aliens who reside with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for them as for yourself; for you too were once aliens.”

Pope John Paul wrote extensively about the human rights and dignity of all people, including all immigrant people. As a group, the Bishops of our country have spoken out clearly in pastoral letters such as *Strangers No Longer* and *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. Individual bishops who have witnessed the mistreatment of people attempting to find a better life in a new country have called upon us to reconsider the plight of the immigrants and to find a better way to help them. Some of their statements are listed below.

“Human rights were inscribed by the Creator in the order of Creation...They are not concessions on the part of human institutions”

– John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*

“Migrants, like all persons possess inherent human dignity which should be respected. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.”

– USCCB, *Strangers No Longer*

“We strongly urge that special attention be directed to the plight of undocumented workers and that every effort be made to remove the fear and prejudice of which they are victims.”

– USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*

The question that we might want to ask ourselves today is, “What can I do about all this?” There is no simple answer, but we might consider pondering the situation of the immigrants through a more thorough investigation of the realities of their life through study and group discussion. A starting article could be one from Pax Christi entitled, “The War at Home: Focus on Immigration.” Another good source found on the internet is, “The Five Myths about Immigration.” There are many other articles about immigration, but it is really important to understand that there is much inconsistency on the topic.

A final note is one to say “Thank you” to all who sent in the immigration cards last fall. We must continue to keep our representatives and senators in Congress informed about our beliefs concerning the immigrant people. Many thanks for reading and considering this article as well.