

The Gospels and Migration

Week 1 (March 5-8)

Matthew 2:13-23

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*"A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."*

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

The U.S. Bishops and Migration

The U.S. bishops have taken the Gospel teachings and the teachings of the Popes and applied it to the immigration reality in the United States. In January 2003, the U.S. bishops issued the pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*. In that document, the U.S. bishops articulated the following five principles that govern how the Church responds to public policy proposals relating to immigration.

1. PERSONS HAVE THE RIGHT TO FIND OPPORTUNITIES IN THEIR HOMELAND. This principle states that a person has a right *not* to migrate. In other words, economic, social, and political conditions in their homeland should provide an opportunity for a person to work and support his or her family in dignity and safety. In public policy terms, efforts should be made to address global economic inequities through just trade practices, economic development, and debt relief. Peacemaking efforts should be advanced to end conflict which forces persons to flee their homes.

2. PERSONS HAVE THE RIGHT TO MIGRATE TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES. When persons are unable to find work and support themselves and their families, they have a right to migrate to other countries and work. This right is not absolute, as stated by Pope John XXIII, when he said this right to emigrate applies when "there are just reasons for it." In the current condition of the world, in which global poverty is rampant and political unrest has resulted in wars and persecution, migrants who are forced to leave Enriching Our Diversity 22 their homes out of necessity and seek only to survive and support their families must be given special consideration.

3. SOVEREIGN NATIONS HAVE A RIGHT TO CONTROL THEIR BORDERS. The Church recognizes the right of the sovereign to protect and control its borders in the service of the common good of its citizens. However, this is not an absolute right. Nations also have an obligation to the universal common good, as articulated by Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*, and thus should seek to accommodate migration to the greatest extent possible. Powerful economic nations, such as the United States, have a higher obligation to serve the universal common good, according to Catholic social teachings. In the current global economic environment, in which labor demands in the United States attract foreign laborers, the United States should establish an immigration system that provides legal avenues for persons to enter the nation legally

in a safe, orderly, and dignified manner to obtain jobs and reunite with family members.

4. REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS SHOULD BE AFFORDED PROTECTION. Persons who flee their home countries because they fear persecution should be afforded safe haven and protection in another country. Conflict and political unrest in many parts of the world force persons to leave their homes for fear of death or harm. The United States should employ a refugee and asylum system that protects asylum seekers, refugees, and other forced migrants and offers them a haven from persecution.

5. THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE HUMAN DIGNITY OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS SHOULD BE RESPECTED. Persons who enter a nation without proper authorization or who over-stay their visas should be treated with respect and dignity. They should not be detained in deplorable conditions for lengthy periods of time, shack-led by their feet and hands, or abused in any manner. They should be afforded due process of the law and, if applicable, allowed to articulate a fear of return to their home before a qualified adjudicator. They should not be blamed for the social ills of a nation.

A Prayer: Immigration Reform from the Heart of God

From the Interfaith Immigration Coalition FastAction Campaign

Heart of God, full of mercy, watch over our sister and brother immigrants.
Protect them from harm even as they suffer mistreatment and humiliations on their way.
Touch with your goodness the hearts of we who see them pass by.
Break open our hearts to embrace them and the gift that they are to our communities.

Heart of God, full of compassion, give our brothers and sisters in Congress the gift of compassion.
Open their eyes to the pain and longing of those affected by their decisions.
Give them wisdom as they struggle to repair our unjust immigration system.
Break open their hearts to embrace the dreams of our immigrant parents, siblings, and friends.

Heart of God, full of love, we give you glory for all the blessings you have given us.
Help us to share those blessings with others that we may all know that you are a God of mercy, a God of compassion, a God of love.

Break open our hearts that we might embrace the challenge to build a land, a nation, a community where all are welcome.

For Reflection:

Who are the people that I know who have immigrated to the United States? Have I had conversations with family members, friends, neighbors, members of your congregation?

Why might they have come?

How can I carry their journey in my prayers this Lent?