

Family Unity

Week 3 (March 16-22)

Ruth 1

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me." Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Luisa's Story

After crossing the length of Mexico over ground to get to the border, "Luisa," a 36 year old widow from the indigenous municipality of Tamazulápam de Espíritu Santo in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, and her 20 year old son "Pedro" attempted to cross into the United States by walking through the harsh and unpopulated desert near Nogales, Arizona. Unlike most unauthorized migrants who attempt to cross the U.S. – Mexico border, Luisa and Pedro did not contract the service of a guide. Instead, they attempted to traverse the desert with three others from Tamazulápam, which is among the poorest and most marginalized municipalities in the country. They had plans to settle in Los Angeles, where many members of their community lived and could help them to find work.

After walking through the hot sun for several hours, Luisa was unable to keep going. Pedro refused to leave his mother's side. Eventually she and her son were apprehended and detained by U.S. Border Patrol agents. Despite telling the Border Patrol agents (both in the field and at the detention center) that Pedro was her son, and asking if they could stay

together, the two were placed in separate cells. After spending 24 hours in the detention center, Luisa was deported to Nogales, Mexico without Pedro. At the time of our interview on October 16, 2012, Luisa had been staying in a shelter for migrants in Nogales for ten days, unable to ascertain the whereabouts of her son, who had likely been deported to a different port of entry. As a woman now alone without a family member or trusted companion, and well aware of the widespread and worsening practice of kidnapping migrants, Luisa fears making the journey home.

Talking Points about Family Unity & Current Legislation

From the Interfaith Immigration Coalition

- Families are the fabric of strong communities and economies. Immigration reform must facilitate family reunification.
- Family unity spurs integration, as families provide strong foundations for learning English, purchasing a home, pursuing employment, starting a business, preparing children for school, and contributing to communities.
- We are not opposed to increases in employment-based visas, but they should not come at the expense of family visas - it's not a zero-sum game. People want to join their families through legal channels, but with wait times as long as 24 years, have no real options to do so. To fix the immigration system, we need to recognize the God-given desire to be with one's family.
- We are opposed to proposals that would eliminate the ability of U.S. citizens to sponsor their siblings, found both in the Senate bill and in the SKILLS Act as it passed the House Judiciary Committee. Brothers and sisters should be able to be together. Our sacred texts show the significance of a unified family. Mary & Martha and disciples Simon Peter & Andrew, as well as James & John are examples of siblings remaining close as adults. In today's current immigration system, Ruth would not have been able to travel with Naomi.

You can also view a study conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in conjunction with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. [*Estimates of the Size and Demography of the Undocumented Non-Citizen Population in U.S. Catholic Dioceses, 2013.*](#)

A Prayer for Families

(excerpted from 2010 National Migration Week Resources)

Good and gracious God, we thank you for the gift of families. We are grateful for all of the joy and love that they bring into our lives, and we ask that you provide special protection for all families, particularly those who face hardships as they move in search of a better life. Show mercy to those who travel in danger, and lead them to a place of safety and peace. Comfort those who are alone and afraid because their families have been torn apart by violence and injustice.

Open our hearts so that we may provide hospitality for all who come in search of refuge. Give us the courage to welcome every stranger as Christ in our midst.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

For Reflection:

What would you do if you felt the best option to care for your family was to live thousands of miles away from them? Can you imagine such a scenario?

What are the biggest stresses in your family that work against stability and unity? How would the looming possibility of deportation impact this stress?

How might you suggest that families remain connected when separated by thousands of miles? Is there something your local Church might do -- or is doing -- to assist in this struggle?