

Children

Week 5 (March 30-April 5)

Matthew 18:1-5

At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me."

The Plight of Migrant Children

By Luis Enrique Jacquez, El Paso, Texas



Five year old migrant child from El Salvador entered the US by himself. He drew this plane saying it reminded him of God because if he had God in his heart, God would be the plane to take him to his mother.

Cynthia sat nervously as she waited for her social worker. A young woman stepped out of the office and sat down next her. Her social worker stepped out and said in Spanish, "Cynthia you can come in now." The woman turned to this young girl from Honduras and gasped, "Tu eres Cynthia? Are you Cynthia? Soy tu mamá! I am your mother!" Tears immediately fell from their eyes. Fourteen years had pass since they had seen each other. Cynthia, now sixteen, ventured to the United States containing only a vague memory of her mother. Extreme poverty in Honduras forced her mother to leave for the United States to support her family. The short separation her mother imagined turned into an unending odyssey for her daughter to dream of the day when they would be reunited. Cynthia's story is now one of about an estimated twenty thousand unaccompanied minors, migrant youths, who enter the United States. Almost doubling the amount from the previous year. The Office of Refugee and Resettlement estimates about 88% of children derive from Central America.

I have worked with unaccompanied minors for five years. The shelter I work at predominately receives children under the age of twelve. I currently live with the Columban Fathers at the Columban Mission Center in El Paso, Texas. Working with this population has challenged me to discern about where God is calling me. The society has supported me in returning to school for a social work degree and to continue working at the detention center. So many young people come with their own story of their journey filled with danger. Some had been assaulted, robbed, severely injured, or saw horrific things that the mention of this brings terror to their young faces.

I belong to the RICO ministry at St Pius X parish in El Paso. This ministry was created in response to the unprecedented surge of migrant children. The ministry offers bible lessons, the opportunity to sing together, and reflection during prayers of God's constant accompaniment. One girl remarked that listening to the parables reassures her that one day she will be reunited with her parents, that one day soon the long journey will end.

The unfortunate reality is that many will eventually be deported back to their country. But for some, the time in detention is short lived, and thankfully, they are quickly reunited with their family in the U.S.

Once reunited the real untold story begins, since no statistics exist of how many minors eventually are granted permanent residency. Minors must attend public school and report to immigration court. Once turning eighteen, they may be told that their temporary stay has expired and that they must be deported. Minors may even be exploited

within the US. Some will feel the effects of culture shock or feel aggression towards parents whom they see as strangers, one of many untold realities that engulfs the immigration issue.

Minors continue and will continue to arrive in this country. Many come with a dream that has nothing to do with the American Dream. It is the dream to one day be with their mother.

Fact Sheet: U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Unaccompanied Alien Children Program.

Prayer for Migrants and Refugees

Mary, Most Holy, you, together with St. Joseph and the Child Jesus, experienced the suffering of exile. You were forced to flee to Egypt to escape the persecution of Herod. Today we entrust the men, women and children who live as migrants and refugees to your maternal protection.

Grant us the grace to welcome them with Christian hospitality, so that these brothers and sisters of ours may find acceptance and understanding on their journey.

Teach us to recognize your Son

- In the migrant who labors to bring food to our tables
- In the refugee seeking protection from persecution, war, and famine
- In the woman and child who are victims of human trafficking
- In the asylum seeker imprisoned for fleeing without documents

May all of those who are far from their place of birth find in the Church a home where no one is a stranger.

We ask this in the name of your blessed Son, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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Text: Marcia Timmel, Adapted from the World Refugee Day Message of Pope Benedict XVI, June 20, 2006.

For Reflection:

Given the importance of family life, the U.S. Catholic bishops believe that family reunification should continue to be a central part of U.S. immigration policy. Yet our current U.S. immigration policy tends to divide families rather than to reunite them. Two million immigrants have been deported under President Obama's administration. How can we ensure that family reunification is at the heart of U.S. immigration policy?

Immigrant children continue to cross the U.S. – Mexico border in increasing numbers each year. Some escape abuse or violence in their home countries. Others come to find family members already in the U.S. Some are victims of human trafficking. What can we do to address the root causes of migration?

Children are currently under the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a division of Health and Human Services. The average stay in the program is 35 days, and 85% are eventually reunited with their families. Adults, in contrast, are detained in immigration detention centers under harsh conditions. How can we move away from the criminalization of immigration to a national policy that reflects values more in line with our faith to welcome the stranger?