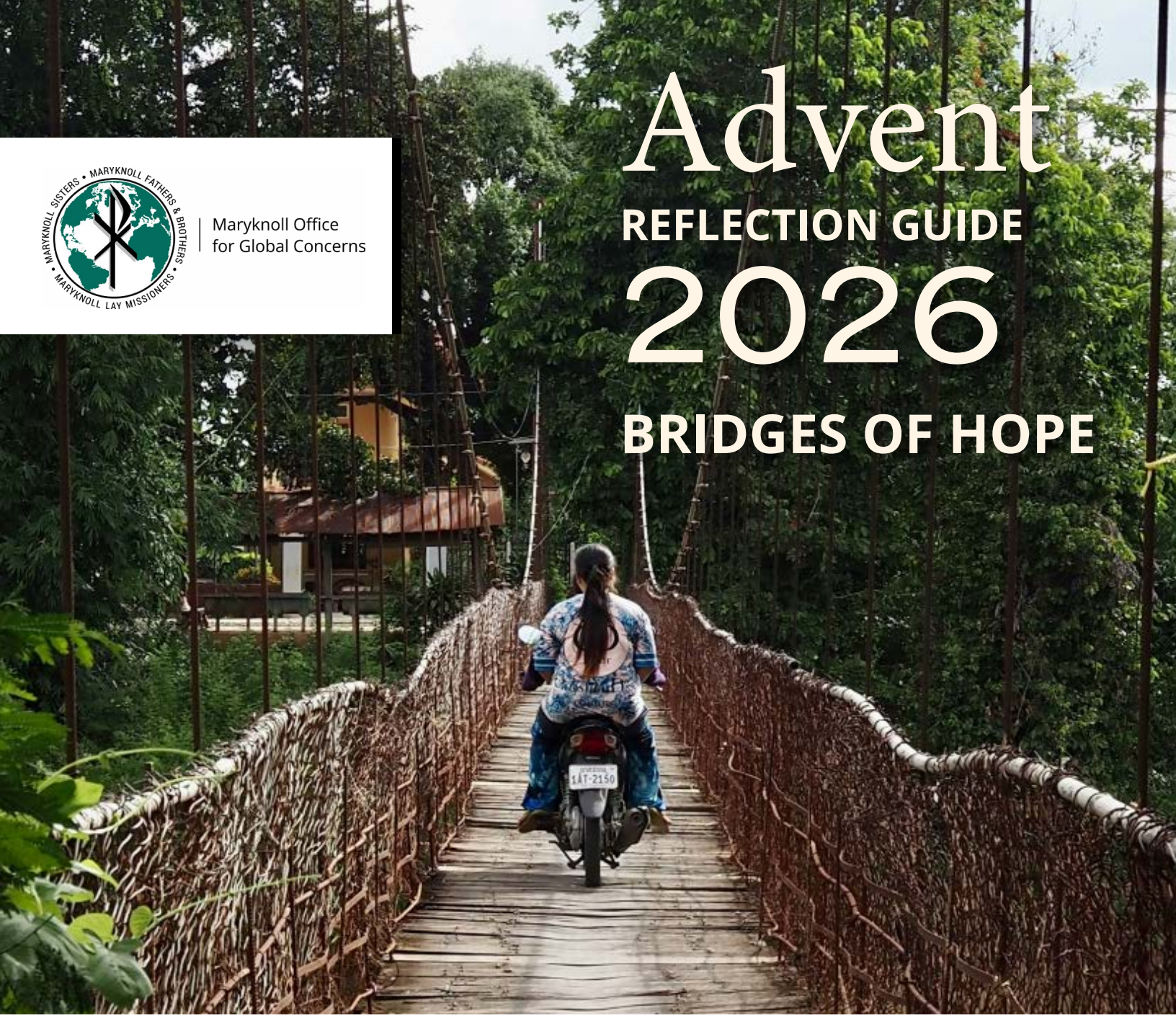


Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Advent

REFLECTION GUIDE

2026

BRIDGES OF HOPE

In a world darkened by war and injustice, even when all seems lost, migrants and refugees stand as messengers of hope.

POPE LEO XIV

About this resource

In this Advent Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Scripture readings in light of Catholic social teaching and Maryknoll mission experience. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life, to pray, and to renew your spirit.

Quotes are from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns online Scripture Reflection series.

Photos

Cover image: Woman driving across a bridge in Cambodia, courtesy of Caitlin James via Unsplash.

First Sunday of Advent: Photo of clients at Oak Park Migrant Ministry, courtesy of Celine Woznica. Photo of three women hugging, courtesy of Jametlene Reskp, via Unsplash.

Second Sunday of Advent: Photo of people walking in Tongariro National Park, courtesy of Sébastien Goldberg, via Unsplash. Photo of Fr. Joyalito Tajonera in Taiwan via Maryknoll Magazine (Paul Jeffrey/ Taiwan).

Third Sunday of Advent: Photo of Temple Mount, courtesy of Raimond Klavins, via Unsplash. Photo of the wall on the border of the United States and Mexico (Olivia Engling/U.S.).

Fourth Sunday of Advent: Photo of members of Hearts and Homes for Refugees, via Maryknoll Magazine. (D. Comfort/U.S.) Photo of Heidi Cerneka and Connie Lara at Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy, via Maryknoll Magazine. (Meinrad Scherer-Emunds/U.S.)

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About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missioners, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missioners serve.

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First Sunday

I give thanks to my God always on your account
for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, to my people.
1 Corinthians 1:4

Migrants receiving services from Oak Park Migrant Ministry.

Today's Gospel reading is from Mark, believed to have been written around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Roman forces had breached the city walls, destroyed the Temple, and slaughtered or enslaved countless people. Mark was addressing the early Christian communities living in those incredibly difficult social and political times. Jesus' words to remain alert and attentive helped ground the early Christians in **HOPE**, to persevere in the knowledge that God is present in their suffering and uncertainty.

Today, both globally and locally, we also find ourselves living in incredibly difficult social and political times. Millions of migrants and refugees have left their homes, searching for safety and a better life in foreign lands. They watch and wait in **HOPE**, like the Holy Family, who fled as refugees into Egypt. On this First Sunday of Advent, we are called to celebrate and uphold this HOPE, to light a candle in the midst of darkness.

In the interfaith Migrant Ministry of the Catholic Community of Oak Park, IL, the journey with our migrant brothers and sisters has been a journey of **HOPE**. Beginning with the influx of migrants at the border in Fall 2022, we have helped resettle and accompany 32 families and have created a migrant center where we distribute clothing, coats, shoes, and bedding, as well as offer social services, immigration support services, English lessons, a warm breakfast, and a wonderful children's play area. When we began, the atmosphere was positive and life-giving as the migrants settled in to start their new lives in America. They were full of **HOPE**.

Now we are accompanying migrants as they prepare to shut down their dreams if they are deported to the countries they were forced to flee. We advise them to secure their children's school and health records, and to save proof of being responsible members of our communities. Sadly, we also encourage them to fill out a form to assign temporary custody of their children in the event the parents are detained. But through all this, we continue to live in **HOPE**, to be Advent people, watching and waiting.

Being Advent people is not a passive experience. It requires us to act and advocate on behalf of the migrants. Recently, our ministry has expanded to a more challenging accompaniment – providing pastoral and spiritual support to migrants who are detained in the Broadview, Illinois, ICE processing center. These are our brothers and sisters, recently held in custody and waiting to be moved to a detention center in another state. They are shocked, traumatized, weeping.

The center is an ice-cold place, designed to detain people. Our team enters the assigned space, reaching out in warmth, friendship, and prayer to the migrants waiting for us. We are priests, pastors, religious, and lay people, anxious to be present to the migrants' suffering but powerless to change their situation. We can provide some help, noting the phone numbers of their loved ones and promising to call them. We can give them the number of a migrant support hotline. There is little else we can do.

But we can pray with them and for them. We can show them by our presence that they have not been abandoned. We can hold their hands in ours and listen attentively as they share their fears of returning to their home country and the pain of being separated from family. We can be present to their suffering, uphold their human dignity, and assure them that in this seemingly God-forsaken place, our loving God is present in their anguish and uncertainty.

- by Celine Woznica, Maryknoll Affiliate

Questions for Reflection

Advent calls us to "watch and wait in hope." What practices help you stay anchored in hope when the news or events feel overwhelming?

How has witnessing the resilience and faith of migrants or other vulnerable communities deepened your own spiritual journey?



Readings

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7|1 Corinthian 1:3-9|Mark 13:33-37

Lighting the candle

One purple candle

We light this candle as a symbol of hope in the world and as a reminder that our ultimate hope is found in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord God,
Thank you for allowing us to spend this time with you and in solidarity with our sisters and brothers on the move around the world.
Please open our minds that we may better understand the plight of those who have been forced to migrate or flee their homes.
Open our hearts that we may be moved to compassion and action
to support those in search of safety and opportunity.
We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

- Courtesy of Catholic Relief Services

Response

Explore these resources to discover pastoral teachings on immigration:
- Review "Migration and Catholic Social Teaching" to explore the Church's key principles: tinyurl.com/52xrux67
- Read the Evangelical-Catholic joint statement on immigration to learn ecumenical wisdom about dignity, families, and migration: tinyurl.com/54rpuvx8
- *Webinar: Who Is My Neighbor?:* tinyurl.com/55h6fet3

Sometime last year, a web of folks were asked to pray for and support a young wife and mother from Latin America after being taken by ICE and detained in a center far from her family. Her identity in 'the system' was no longer her own endeared name but an 'A number', her alien identification. Months have slid by – silence, legal papers, daring to entrust her story to unknown lawyers, hearings, raised and dashed hopes, and more and more waiting. A few weeks ago, two people from the network were able to visit her in the ICE facility. She spoke guardedly of conditions there, and of missing her family and important events for her children. When asked how time passes, she said that she knows God has a plan for her in that time and place. Somehow, she manages to gather other detained women to pray and share Bible stories, commenting that some women know nothing of the Bible or God. She is happy to share what she knows and believes and how God is with her. What experience and words of mercy and hope and faith and love are others receiving from her? Right where she is, right in the midst of this sad and unsuspected stop on her life's journey, she responds so personally to "Who do you say that I am?" Even if she needs to whisper, the message is loud enough for others to hear. How is it that she knows "I AM" sent her with courage and the fire of love to cast light into darkness? Because of her, others may hear that same question, too. "Who do you say that I am?"

- Sister Janet Hockman, M.M.
Maryknoll Sister



Second Sunday

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Isaiah 40:1

Advent is a bridge we must cross to reach the Christmas Season. There are many kinds of bridges, depending on where you are coming from. For migrants, reaching their final destination is like Christmas. However, prior to getting there, many bridges have to be crossed, many sacrifices and challenges to be endured, as well as opportunities for encounters, of giving oneself to the other and vice versa.

We are all migrants on a journey towards our final destination, to a heavenly bliss with our loving creator. We walk this life not alone but with our family and the people we encounter along the way. Each one carries something for us or vice versa. Therefore, being aware and present in the moment is a gift. The migrants we encounter are our brothers, sisters, and opportunities to exchange gifts. What God-given gifts do we carry? A gift of presence, gift of listening, gift of support, gift of understanding, and the gift of receiving and welcoming Christ through love that we share with our neighbors, especially migrants and people in need.

One encounter I carry in my heart is a short-term friendship in the shelter where I served, with a migrant woman who fled her country with her nephew to save him from being recruited by the gangs who were terrorizing their community. As they escaped, they were in a vehicle accident on the U.S. side of the border and were rushed to the hospital.

She lost the use of her legs, while her nephew, being young, recovered and was able to walk again. Throughout their ordeal, her strong faith and belief that they were in God's hands kept her spirit bright and joyful. She didn't wallow in her pain and conditions but made efforts to help in the kitchen, do laundry, sew, and learn a trade to help herself get started once she reached her new home. She was a light to me, guiding me see and examine how I can deepen my relationship with God.

Prayer

God of the Journey, may this Advent Season help us recognize you in those we meet and in all our encounters, so that Christ may be born anew in our hearts and through us in the hearts of others this Christmas. We join with Sr. Mila Díaz Solano, a Peruvian Dominican Sister working in Chicago, where she teaches Spanish-speaking deacon-candidates and strives to elevate the voices of those not often heard in the U.S. church, in praying *"May we be the first this Christmas to recognize Emmanuel—the image of Christ imprinted in every migrant. In this way, we can help others not to see them [as Pope Francis said] 'a problem to be solved but as a brother or sister to be welcomed, respected, and loved'."*

- by Coralis Salvador, Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Questions for Reflection

What bridge is God inviting you to cross this Advent Season, and what gift are you being called to share with those you meet along the way?

How can you better see and honor the image of Christ in every migrant?

Readings

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11 | 2 Peter 3:8-14 | Mark 1:1-8

Lighting the candles

Two purple candles

As we light the Second Candle of Advent, we welcome your peace into our hearts, minds, and lives. Help us become true peacemakers in our communities and the world.

Prayer for the Migrants

Lord, just as the Prophet Isaiah did in his time, so we in this time share your vision of hope.
We, too, have experienced the burning sands and thirsty ground of human indifference and exclusion.
We mourn the suffering of our brothers and sisters from Latin America and elsewhere forced by violence, corruption and misery to leave family and everything they treasure to seek a chance at life here in our blest land.

But we know, Lord, that you yourself are a migrant. You experienced the trials of the refugee, having fled as a child with your parents, Joseph and Mary, to Egypt.
We know your special love for those with no other possession but one another, and you.

Move our hearts, Lord, and the hearts of our leaders to love them as you do, to love them with your love, to be your love for migrants at the doorway of our country.
Fill our hearts with your compassion. Help us to know that by loving in this way we will not be depending on our limited resources but upon the abundance of the One who with a simple blessing provided a banquet for five thousand with five small loaves of bread and two fish.

Fill us with joy and gladness as we become witnesses of your transforming work. You who call forth life from nothing and make the desert bloom, save those who call upon you. Ransom them and fill them with your joy. Accompany them with the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, with San Toribio Romo, with our own San Pedro De Jesus Maldonado and all the Saints. And grant that one day we who have served them here may migrate with them to the Kingdom where you live and reign forever and ever.
Amen!

- Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz, D.D., Bishop of El Paso



Father Joyalito Tajonera greets people at a meal in the Ugnayan shelter for migrant workers, located in the Tanzi Catholic Church in Taiwan

The Canaanite woman ... is an outsider, not a member of the people of Israel, yet she approaches Jesus with courage and faith. She is persistent in her cry when she says, "Lord, help me." She refuses to take "no" for an answer, not because she is entitled, but because she is a mother who loves her child and has absolute clarity about who Jesus is.

- Br. Wayne Fitzpatrick, M.M.
Maryknoll Brother

Response

Read "Immigrant Paperwork Trap Fuels Arrest" to learn how new government policies and application delays threat documented immigrants' status, putting them arisk of detention and deportation: bit.ly/4Bt03u7

Watch *The Current State of Migration in the United States* presentation given by Pedro Chavez at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington, D.C. to learn about the current realities: https://tinyurl.com/2s4yaawz



Third Sunday

"I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,'"
John 1:23

Temple Mount, the golden Dome of the Rock mosque in the old city of Jerusalem, Israel.

This Sunday's Scripture readings open with these words of the prophet Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; God has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God."

The prophet reminds us of the mandate from God we received at our baptism: to be bearers of the Good News, of God's loving presence among us. How do we carry out this mandate and mission in our world today?

How do we share the Good News when the truth can get buried by artificial intelligence-accelerated falsehoods, misinformation, and disinformation? When standing for the rights of the vulnerable – migrants, refugees, occupied populations, and the environment – can lead to arrests, harassment, silencing, and even death? When unfounded fear and polarization are often propagated as national security and in the national interest?

We have witnessed an increase in the systemic silencing of those who defend human rights, the unleashing of ill-trained Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents into our communities, the gutting of refugee and asylum programs, the inhumane third-country deportations, and more. These events and actions have perhaps made us feel like the voice of one crying out in the desert, "Make straight the way of the Lord."

Perhaps some of us have doubted the effectiveness of our witness and our reliance on nonviolent resistance. Maybe some of us have hit the rock bottom of despair due to the sheer intensity of the injustice happening around us, and have wondered, 'How do I continue to be a witness of hope, love, empathy, compassion, and respect for human dignity and rights?'

Perhaps others have felt the need to avert their eyes and try to ignore the suffering around them, and let what they hope is just a "winter of our discontent" play its course because it is too difficult to imagine another way, or the fear of experiencing a personal cost from speaking up is too great.

All these things, we can bring to our loving God in prayer.

For instance, recently, I was at the cusp of despair when God snapped me out of it by inviting me to virtually visit with communities in Palestine that are experiencing extreme government-sanctioned settler violence, displacement, dehumanization, and oppression. Each day, in different iterations, people said to me, "Thank you for visiting with us; it makes us feel we are connected with the larger human community, and we have hope that the sun of justice will rise." These people renewed my hope; they built a bridge of hope in a profound way.

Proclaiming hope calls for courageous attentiveness and solidarity with those experiencing fear, displacement, dispossession, detention, deportation, dehumanization, and with those who are standing up for truth, justice, and peace. The psalmist in today's scripture demonstrates to us what this courageous radical attentiveness is: that we, "lowly servants," have been bequeathed by God to share in God's mission of love and hope. This is an awesome gift that continually roots us in God. We must "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in all circumstances give thanks."

Ours is to be faithful to the call because the "one who calls us will accomplish" the mission (1 Thes 5:24). Like John the Baptist, we are testifiers to the light, to hope, to love. May we ever rejoice in the privilege of being invited to the mission of hope.

- Sister Susan Nchubiri, M.M.

Questions for Reflection

How can we care for each other and ourselves as we work for justice and peace?

Where do you see hope, peace, and solidarity rising up in your community?



The wall at the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas.

Readings

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11 | 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 | John 1:6-8, 19-28

Lighting the candles

Two purple candles and one pink

We light these candles to celebrate the joy that Jesus brings into our lives. May our joy be a light that brings goodness, peace, and hope into the world.

Prayer

Good Lord and Heavenly Father,
You love each one of your children regardless of the lands they come from.
We thank you for helping us to recognize each other as members of the same human family and as your beloved people.
We thank you because you enlighten us, encourage us, and feed us with your Word.
We pray for those that suffer due to hunger, injustice, climate change, and poverty—so that together we may find solutions to change their lives.
We pray for our countries, so that we may find viable paths for international collaboration and authentic human development.
We pray for our Church, so that we may learn to be all brothers and sisters. Thus, we ask for a humble heart that is willing to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate those who knock at our doors.
We pray this in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is present in our brothers and sisters, who lives and reigns forever and ever.

Amen.

- Courtesy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

[W]e stand united in our commitment to the Gospel, which compels us to welcome the stranger as we would welcome Christ himself. Our century of global mission has taught us that while borders may define nations, they do not limit human dignity....

Our perspective is informed by decades of lived experience alongside those on the margins in the Global South. People do not flee their homes and kin on a whim; they flee out of a desperate necessity for survival. Migration is a symptom of global inequity. When the yoke of poverty, persecution, and violence is loosened, families can exercise their right not to migrate and instead flourish in their home communities.

We stand at a crossroads. We can choose a path of exclusion and fear, or we can choose the path of the Good Samaritan. The Maryknoll family remains committed to love, walking alongside our migrant brothers and sisters until every person is treated with the dignity befitting a child of God.

- Maryknoll Joint Leadership Statement

Maryknoll Sisters; Maryknoll Lay Missioners; Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers; Maryknoll Affiliates

Response

Urge Congress to provide a pathway to permanent legal status for Dreamers and immigrants with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED): https://tinyurl.com/4edjw8aa

Watch *Haiti Deportation Crisis*, a PBS FRONTLINE documentary that investigates deportation policies' impact on Haitian immigrants in the U.S. and the dangers they face if returned to Haiti: bit.ly/4yVU3b2



Fourth Sunday

I have been with you wherever you went.
2 Samuel 7:9

Members of Hearts and Homes for Refugees from Pelham, N.Y. waiting to greet a Syrian refugee family arriving in the United States.

In the first reading for today, from the Second Book of Samuel, God is portrayed as a wanderer, one who has no fixed abode, as the Ark of the Covenant is carried from place to place and kept in a tent so that it can be easily moved. In today's Gospel reading from Luke, Mary is presented as a simple Galilean peasant girl, who cannot presume to give birth to anyone great. Yet, God seems to prefer honoring those without home, power, or acclaim rather than those with wealth and prestige.

It is similar in today's world, where millions of migrants and refugees move from country to country, seeking safety, refuge, and the possibility of improving their families' economic opportunities in life. In some places, they are met with hospitality and services to help them feel welcome in their new abode. In other places, they are met with xenophobia, scorn, and often brutal treatment, followed by deportation to their home country or even to countries they have never heard of.

In Westchester County, New York, where the Maryknoll headquarters is located, there are several excellent groups reach out to help migrants and refugees settle safely in the United States and provide the education and skills they will need to take care of themselves after the period of resettlement is completed. One of these groups is called Hearts & Homes for Refugees. Over the last ten years, they have assisted with the resettlement of more than one hundred refugee families from Syria, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world. They have done so with little assistance from the U.S. government, relying instead on hundreds of volunteers and an equal number of very generous donors.

Our faith teaches us that when these volunteers help a refugee family to settle in their community, they are participating in finding a home for our wandering God, in whose image the refugee family is created.

And just as Mary, the Blessed Mother, found comfort and care from Joseph, her cousin Elizabeth, the shepherds, and later the Magi from the East, refugees today are often those most in need of special concern.

Hearts & Homes for Refugees offers wellness programs led by health professionals, to help the refugees cope with trauma, isolation, and worry for those left behind. For Afghan refugees, for whom language can be an obstacle, Afghan-American mental health professionals provide space for people to discuss their concerns, learn coping skills and healthy habits, and build connections. This past summer, three groups met at least six times, with 36 participants in the men's group, 34 in the Dari-language women's group, and 14 in the Pashto-language women's group.The Afghan American Community Center also facilitated a special presentation on family safety, a matter of concern that the refugee families raised themselves. Integration into life in the U.S. does not stop after the initial period of resettlement; people, especially women, continue to meet in support groups where they can share their stories, process their journeys, and feel less alone.

Children are also included in outreach services, receiving free school bags and participating in physical activities and sports. The Imam from a local mosque also gave them a talk about making wise choices, faith, and friendships.

These are concrete examples of how God is building a home for all God's beloved creation, particularly those most marginalized. May we welcome God into God's home, not one made of stone and marble, but of love for all people from throughout the world.

-by Father Frank Breen, M.M.

Questions for Reflection

What does the image of God as a wanderer mean to you?

How can God work through your strengths and weaknesses to fulfill God's plan?

Readings

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 | Romans 16:25-27 | Luke 1:26-38

Lighting the candles

Three purple candles and one pink

We light these candles to celebrate the love of God who sent Jesus into the world.

Prayer

God of all nations, we lift up to you our brothers and sisters who have left their homelands seeking safety.

We pray for immigrants everywhere, especially those who are vulnerable and marginalized. Be with them on their journey, Lord.

Protect them from harm, guide them to safe haven and open doors of opportunity filled with hope and dignity. Surround them with your love and the kindness of others.

We pray for our Church, that it may be a beacon of welcome and support for immigrants in our communities. Inspire us to show the same compassion and generosity that you have shown us.

Help us to embrace the richness of diversity and to work for justice for all.

May our parishes be places where immigrants find friendship, understanding and a spiritual home. May we walk with them, honoring their stories and embracing the beauty of their traditions.

We call upon the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, that her mantle of love enfolds all God's children in need of protection. We ask all this through Christ our Lord, who himself was a refugee and stranger in a foreign land.

Amen.

- Courtesy of Pax Christi USA

Response

Watch *Climate Change and Migration: Two Interconnected Crises*, a webinar from Catholic Climate Covenant exploring how climate-related disasters drive migration and how Catholic Social Teaching informs the Church's response to support and accompany migrants: tinyurl.com/ywntv3za



Lay Missioner Heidi Cerneka (left), attorney, consults with paralegal Connie Lara at Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, Texas, where the pair offers legal aid to migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Lately, I've been feeling pretty troubled and abandoned, as I consider the state of our world with violence, greed, environmental exploitation, and the horrific maldistribution of wealth. But here Jesus says "like" sheep without a shepherd. It is the sensation, not the reality. We have so many shepherds in our lives, in our world, and throughout history. Jesus is present, embodied in so many courageous and loving people. We have to pause, to look and to listen to meet them and him....

We are reminded that we are not abandoned, not shepherd-less, and certainly not alone. We know grace in every dandelion flower, every chirping house finch, every smile of a stranger, every embrace of a mother reunited with her children.

We are the shepherds, but we are also lost sheep in need of help. We are the disciples, and Jesus sends us out to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and drive out demons. We are called to go out to our neighbors, to those that we judge (sometimes wrongly) or that society tells us are not worthy. And we trust they will do the same for us....

Justice, goodness, care for the neighbor are all present, and will flourish again, IF we give without cost; IF we go out to the harvest, and IF we hearken to God's voice and keep our baptismal covenant with God.

- Heidi Cerneka
Maryknoll Lay Missioner