Reign of the Sacred Heart

Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation

IMMIGRATION ISSUE MAY 2025

DID YOU KNOW?

- There are approximately 2.9 million agricultural workers in the United States. National Center for Farmworker Health
- 70% of agricultural workers in the U.S. are foreign born. National Center for Farmworker Health
- In 2022, the immigration courts had a backlog of 470,000 asylum cases with an average wait of 1,942 days (over 5 years). Syracuse University
- About 80% of asylum claims in the U.S. fail or are rejected in immigration court. U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Undocumented people represent approximately 3.3% of the total U.S. population, but 23% of the foreign-born population. Pew Research Center

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Looking For Liberty

by Fr. Duy Nguyen, SCJ

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

These lines are from the poem The New Colossus written by Emma Lazarus in 1883. Emma, a New York City native and activist, who helped refugees escape antisemitism in Europe, hailed from a large Jewish family. Her sonnet, embedded in a plaque placed at the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty a few years later, is an expression of her compassion for all refugees seeking freedom, opportunity, and a new life.

The United States of America has always been a nation of immigrants since its discovery and official founding. No person is native except for the indigenous tribes (Sioux, Chippewa, Cherokee, Navajo, etc.) who existed here long before the first European boats arrived at the shores.

Immigration is a source of contention in the United States and a focal topic for many other wealthy countries. There is no doubt that countries have the right to secure their borders and manage the flow of migration and the Catholic Church does not dispute this.

The Catholic Church, non-aligned with any political party and recognizing sovereign rights of nations and adherence to the rule of law, has long advocated for the dignity of the human person and the welcoming of the stranger, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. When a stranger is welcomed, Jesus is welcomed. When food, drink, material goods are offered, they are given to Him. When dignity is respected and love is shown, they are done to Him and for Him.

With increased sweeping arrests and deportations of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants, those with criminal records and without any offenses, how can we, as a nation, proceed forward to find a just and humane path in our immigration system, balancing the sovereign rights to control the border and follow the teachings of Jesus?

The United States bishops urge the government to reform our immigration policies. While our country did not establish any official religion in its founding, the principles and laws were defined by Christian values. Jesus' teachings guided us and will guide our path if we allow him into our hearts.

May the empathy within Emma's poem resonate and stir us forward as a united country.

Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Church in the United States is an immigrant Church with a long history of embracing diverse newcomers and providing assistance and pastoral care to immigrants, migrants, refugees, and people on the move. Our Church has responded to Christ's call for us to "welcome the stranger among us," for in this encounter with the immigrant, the migrant, and the refugee in our midst, we encounter Christ.

A rich body of Church teaching, including Papal encyclicals, Bishops' statements and pastoral letters, has consistently reinforced our moral obligation to treat the stranger as we would treat Christ himself. In the 2001 pastoral statement, Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, the Bishops of the United States called upon the Catholic faithful to a conversion of minds and hearts, imploring us to communion and solidarity with diverse newcomers, and entreating us to find new and meaningful ways to welcome our immigrant sisters and brothers into our parishes, schools and communities. In 2003, the Bishops of the United States, together with the Bishops of Mexico, in the pastoral statement, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope" / "Juntos en el Camino de la Esperanza Ya no Somos Extranjeros" acknowledged that the current immigration system is badly in need of reform and offered a comprehensive set of recommendations for changing U.S. laws and policies to bring

"Where is your brother?" His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity."

- Pope Francis

3 Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching On Immigration

First Principle: People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.

Every person has an equal right to receive from the earth what is necessary for life—food, clothing, shelter. Moreover, every person has the right to education, medical care, religion, and the expression of one's culture. Clearly, it is not God's will that some of his children live in luxury while others have nothing. In Luke's Gospel, the rich man was condemned for living well while the poor man starved at his doorstep (Lk 16:19-31).

Second Principle: A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.

While people have the right to move, no country has the duty to receive so many immigrants that its social and economic life are jeopardized. For this reason, Catholics should not view the work of the federal government and its immigration control as negative or evil.

Third Principle: A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

A country's regulation of borders and control of immigration must be governed by concern for all people and by mercy and justice. A nation may not simply decide that it wants to provide for its own people and no others. A sincere commitment to the needs of all must prevail.

- CST on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples

Wisconsin Catholic Bishops

Protecting Human Dignity by Welcoming the Stranger

- The Catholic Church's position on immigration is based in the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ insisted that when we welcome the stranger, we welcome Him (Mt 25:35,40).
- Our Catholic faith further teaches that "more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent that they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of security, and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin" (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 2241).
- When the Church supports immigrants, she is not doing so to impede the lawful enforcement of immigration laws, nor to encourage illegal entry. Rather, without contradiction, the Church instructs everyone to follow the law and to uphold fundamental human rights.
- In U.S. law, every person, regardless of immigration status, has certain fundamental human rights, which can never be infringed.
- All people have the right to religious freedom to attend church services and to receive sacraments and pastoral care.

Upholding the Rule of Law

- While the Catholic Church always welcomes the stranger, she also recognizes the right of nations to regulate immigration for the sake of the common good (CCC 2241).
- Nations have sovereign rights to control their borders. Indeed, safe and secure borders help everyone.
- The Church opposes both completely open borders and completely closed borders. • Immigration policy must achieve a proper balance between migrant rights and sovereign rights.

Fostering the Common Good through Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- This current crisis exists because our U.S. immigration system has been broken for decades, no matter which party holds power.
- Legal pathways to entry, residency, and citizenship have become so few and so burdensome that many individuals risk everything to enter illegally. This puts them in danger of exploitation.
- Our nation will continue to face challenges without implementing immigration policies that are balanced and humane. Mass deportation of millions of people is not the answer.
- Distinctions must be made between immigrants who present genuine risks and dangers to society and therefore may be lawfully expelled, and those who have been here for years, have no criminal record, and have lived peacefully and contributed to the common good.
- The U.S. bishops have long advocated for comprehensive immigration reform that enables legal entry, provides pathways to citizenship, and maintains family unity. As our brother bishops wrote this past November,

> We hope that our country can develop an effective asylum system for those fleeing persecution and an immigration system that keeps our borders safe and secure, with enforcement policies that focus on those who present risks and dangers to society, particularly efforts to reduce gang activity, stem the flow of drugs, and end human trafficking. The United States should have an immigration system that protects vulnerable migrants and their families, many of whom have already been victimized by criminal actors.

Wisconsin Bishops' Pastoral Letter On Immigration

What Can I Do?

1. LEARN

- Undocumented Immigrants' Rights

- In Memoriam: Pope Francis

- Undocumented, Farm Workers, and Asylum Seekers

2. ACT

- Volunteer at a non-profit teaching English and culture and help prepare immigrants for U.S. citizenship interviews.

- Contact your local congressional leaders about supporting legislation that helps immigrants.

- Direct immigrants to proper legal services.

- Inform immigrants of their rights.

Prayer

Lord our God, you have made the world and all it holds. You preserve it and bless it. You rise above every human boundary: of nation and culture, age and status, sex and race.

Lord, shatter in us every barrier of prejudice and of fear that prevents us from acting as disciples of Jesus.

Today we want to unite ourselves with your compassion for those who suffer. Help us to stand with them in their struggle for liberation. Amen.

Reparation Prayer from "This Day of God," community prayer book of the Priests of the Sacred Heart

The Priests of the Sacred Heart:
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JPR Website