

Homily suggestions for National Migration Week:

“No American institution does more for immigrants than your Christian communities. Now you are facing this stream of Latin immigration which affects many of your dioceses. Not only as the Bishop of Rome, but also as a pastor from the South, I feel the need to thank and encourage you.” —Pope Francis, Prayer with the Bishops of the United States of America, September 2015

Immigrants who come to the United States, and particularly those who are undocumented, are a particularly vulnerable population who need someone to speak on behalf of their human rights and dignity. Our moral tradition calls on all people of faith and goodwill to stand up in defense of life and human dignity; it is a fundamental calling for us as Catholics. Scripture speaks repeatedly of the migration experience, from Abraham who was sent out from his homeland in the Old Testament, to the Holy Family who fled Herod and lived their lives for a time as refugees in a foreign land. When the scriptural or liturgical texts address migration and themes related to it, whether on a special occasions or on regular Sundays, the homily can be an effective moment for prophetic instruction and encouragement.

Throughout National Migration Week, the readings highlight the temporal character of existence and the importance that we not place too much trust in worldly goods. In recalling the temporal nature and recognizing the relative character of the goods of the earth, we must also guard against identifying too closely with the artificial divisions that separate one person from another, divisions that become visible too often with respect to things like economic class or national origin. We must always behave towards others in such a way that respects their human dignity. We are called on to follow the path that God laid out for us and heed to the example of Christ, who “endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb 12:1-4).

Welcoming the migrant and migration more broadly has a central place in the development of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Stories in both the Old and the New Testament highlight the fact that in providing hospitality to the stranger we might also be unwittingly entertaining angels (Heb 13:2; Gen 18:1-15). Abraham unknowingly provides hospitality to the Lord in Mamre helped secure he and Sara a child. Not only did Abraham show such hospitality, but he himself was once a migrant. The Letter to the Hebrews, highlights the story of Abraham who, by faith, “obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country.” (Heb 11). It might be worth reminding those at Mass that our very faith has its roots by the decision made by one man, Abraham--a migrant--who decided to follow God’s command to travel to a foreign land.

Jesus tells us that when we throw a banquet, we should not invite our relatives or wealthy neighbors, “but the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind” (Lk 14). Does this have

any bearing on policies that are put into place with respect to migration? It does not mean is that we are obligated to invite all of the world's poor into the country and disregard the well-being of those who are already here. Rather this passage invites us to reflect on the degree to which we, in our surplus, provide to those who live in a state of deficit. Where we are able to provide support and care for the poor and the downtrodden out of our excess, we are obligated to help. It is for this reason that we must balance the demands of the common good of our country, while responding to the needs of those standing on the outside who can benefit from our wealth. This can mean that we should implement a generous immigration policy that enables people to come and work and try to earn a better living than they might have available to them in their homeland. This might also mean that we turn our attention to the developing world and try to help these countries, through such mechanisms as foreign aid and humane trade agreements, to build up their economy so that their citizenry can find work there and not have to leave their families and communities to find it elsewhere.

Too often the media messages that we hear in relation to migrants is distorted and provides a false understanding of who migrants are and why they come. The rhetoric surrounding this issue can easily bias people in ways that do not properly appreciate the benefits that migrants can bring to our communities. Teach people about what the Church's rich body of social thought says about our Christian responsibility to "welcome the stranger among us."