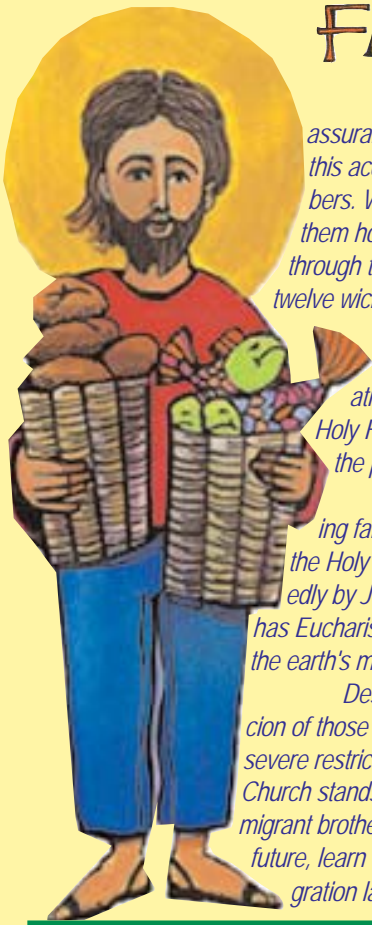


FROM MANY, ONE FAMILY OF GOD



The Gospel of Mark tells us the wonderful story of Jesus feeding over 5,000 people, providing miraculous assurance of the providence of God as well as a reminder that His abundance is meant to be shared with all people. In this account we are told that Jesus first asked his apostles to feed the crowd who were coming and going in great numbers. When, in astonishment, they expressed their fear that they did not have enough to share, Jesus lovingly asked them how much they did have. Only five loaves and two fish he was told - certainly not enough for this throng! Yet through the power of Christ, the small offering of his followers was sufficient not only to satisfy all in the crowd, but to fill twelve wicker baskets with fragments.

What lessons can we learn from this account and others throughout Scripture when considering the migration phenomenon today? The mere mention of immigration evokes strong emotions, both positive and negative, from citizens and lawmakers alike. Among Catholics, there are deep divisions as well. Recent calls from the Holy Father and the bishops for solidarity and unity with migrants are often met with indifference and hostility. And yet, the principles and teaching underlying these exhortations are biblical, not political, in their origin.

Scripture is filled with stories of God's migrant people. In the Old Testament, we witness the Israelites facing famine by crossing into Egypt. Once again in the New Testament, Egypt serves as a place of refuge and safety for the Holy Family as they flee to escape the murderous designs of King Herod on the life of Jesus. We are reminded repeatedly by Jesus, as well as the prophets, to welcome strangers as we would welcome him. To Jesus, the unity of his people has Eucharistic significance. He teaches us that just as many grains become the one bread - his sacred body - so too, from the earth's many people comes one family of God, the mystical Body of Christ on earth.

Despite this clear biblical tradition of hospitality and welcome, we have become a nation gripped by fear and suspicion of those who come among us from near and distant lands. Legitimate security concerns have caused many to call for severe restrictions and even a halt to immigration. In the midst of this debate and the social divisions it engenders, the Catholic Church stands as a prophetic voice calling the faithful and all people of goodwill to reach out in love and understanding to our migrant brothers and sisters. We must learn of the realities that cause them to leave all that is precious behind for an uncertain future, learn the truth about the many contributions they make and gifts they bring to our society, and work to reform our immigration laws that cause family disintegration and strife within communities.

The New Migrants - Our Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Not unlike Jesus' own disciples, our first reaction is often one of anxiety and concern when Jesus asks us to welcome the many newcomers beginning new lives in our midst. Yet just as the disciples learned from the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, so America finds that its newest arrivals bring blessings as well -- economic, cultural, and spiritual - regardless of the circumstances that bring them here and their present legal status.

Economically, immigrants and migrants contribute far more in taxes than they receive in benefits. Recent studies show that migrants - undocumented as well as documented -- contribute between \$90 to \$140 billion each year in federal, state, and local income, property and sales taxes, while using only about \$5 billion in public benefits. Rather than taking jobs from American workers, migrants fill gaps at both the low and high end of the employment spectrum that would seriously weaken U.S. business if left unfilled by native-born workers. The net benefit of immigration to the U.S. economy is pegged at \$10 billion annually.

Culturally, more than 75% of migrants speak English well within ten years of arriving in the U.S., and demand for adult English classes far exceeds supply. Over a third of immigrants to our land have become naturalized citizens, and many more eagerly await the opportunity to become citizens as soon as eligible. Many immigrants choose to serve their new homeland through military service or other forms of voluntary action. The rich diversity of cultural experience they bring to our land enriches our worship, celebrations, cuisine, art, schools and neighborhoods.

Spiritually, when we welcome the stranger in our midst we welcome Christ himself. Jesus promises that whatever we do for others we do for him. Like the disciples we may find ourselves amazed at how our small offerings to others are multiplied by the grace of God and return to us a hundredfold.

In this era of heightened concern about terror attacks, many fear that we must curtail immigration in order to protect our nation.

Research indicates, however, that harsh immigration restrictions actually weaken rather than strengthen U.S. security by increasing the flow of undocumented migration thereby preventing our government from tracking those entering the country. In fact, none of the restrictive laws currently proposed will bring about the high level of national security that all Americans desire. Only a generous immigration policy based on a sound system of laws and safeguards will keep our nation strong and continue its long tradition as a beacon of hope for those who come bearing gifts.





How Are We Called To Respond?



In their pastoral letter, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops set forth four challenges to the people of God in responding to migrants and other newcomers in their midst:

- ❖ The Call to Conversion - exhorting each us to remember our heritage and set aside cultural fears and competition for resources, in order to better welcome newcomers;
- ❖ The Call to Communion - inviting us to the ministry of welcome and hospitality as an expression of Eucharistic unity;
- ❖ The Call to Solidarity - challenging us to move beyond charity to taking a stand for true justice for those who are suffering, vulnerable, and in need; and finally,
- ❖ The Call to Evangelization - encouraging us to invite others to encounter the person of Jesus, active in the world, especially in the poor, in the stranger, and in the migrant and refugee.



"... the Spirit of Pentecost is at work to gather together into one the scattered children of God."

Pope John Paul II, February 2, 1999

Our Bishops urge us to meet these challenges first and foremost in our own parishes, where we are expected to create a welcoming home for all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. To assist parishes in meeting this goal, Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops offers a wealth of free parish resources online in the *Unity in Diversity Parish Resource Kit* as well as in the annual *National Migration Week* resources.

www.usccb.org/mrs/uidparkitpdf.shtml

www.usccb.org/mrs/nmw.shtml

Beyond creating welcoming communities in our parishes, the Bishops have spoken out in favor of immigration reforms that include:

- ❖ A fair and workable opportunity for undocumented migrants currently in the country to earn legal status and eventually have the right to become citizens;
- ❖ A worker program that will allow future migrant workers to cross our borders safely and legally, with worker protections once they are employed, and with the option for future citizenship;
- ❖ Family reunification policies that reduce the backlogs and waiting times for family based immigration;
- ❖ The restoration of due process protections for immigrants, that have threatened basic human rights;
- ❖ International policies that will address the injustices and repression that are the root causes of migration from poor and developing countries.

Continue to learn about migration by joining the *Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope* campaign and by sharing these facts with friends and family. Contact your legislators to let them know you support positive immigration reform, and work within your parish and diocese to create welcoming communities of support for newcomers. Since its founding, the United States has been a nation of immigrants, and its cultural diversity has been its strength. We must not let ignorance, fear, or suspicion change our identity now.

www.justiceforimmigrants.org

You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:34



What Does the Catholic Church Teach About Migration?

The five principles that form the foundation of Catholic Social Teaching about migration are rooted in the understanding that all of God's children have a right to share in the earth's resources.

These principles teach that:

- ❖ People should not be forced to migrate due to a lack of opportunity in their homeland.
- ❖ People have a basic right to move to another land in order to support themselves and their family.
- ❖ Every nation has the right to control its border, although this right carries with it the responsibility to accommodate migrant flows.
- ❖ Refugees and asylum seekers, fleeing either war and persecution or natural disaster, have a right to protection.
- ❖ The dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants must be respected.