



A Lenten Journey with Immigrants and Refugees

On March 18, 1958, Thomas Merton had an experience that redefined his monastic identity with greater involvement in social justice issues. Here is his description of the experience:

"In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers."

As we journey toward the celebration of Easter, the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative Immigration and Refugee Justice Team offer some reflections centering on the idea which Merton expressed in the experience he had that March 18th, *"that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers."*

These reflections will focus our thoughts and prayers on the issues of immigration and refugees. Starting with Ash Wednesday, each week will offer some prayers, some input, and some reflection questions. It would be helpful for you to keep a journal as you journey through Lent 2024. Perhaps a small group of your friends could gather once a week and share this journey with one another.

Pope Francis reminds us that "Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy." May our journey these next 6 weeks be one of awakening, movement, and action as followers of Jesus.

Ash Wednesday - Feb 14th, 2024

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, creator of all that is. While most of us live in safe homes with at least the basic necessities of life, we know that not everyone does. Those who suffer from inadequate income, food, or safety because of the color of their skin or the country where they live are our neighbors. They may not live next door, but Jesus reminds us that even the stranger is our neighbor. Help us to be generous and welcoming as You have been to us. Show us how. Amen.

One Families Journey by Richard Sroczyński, Immigrant & Refugee Justice Team Member

Before I was born, the country my parents came from was being torn apart by war. My parents were just students at the time, and they, along with the other children and their mothers, were captured and taken to prisons far away, while the men were executed. During their captivity, the girl who would become my mother was taken advantage of, resulting in a child, my older sister. Years later, as the war was ending, they were released but not allowed to return to their homes. They were forced to head out in opposite directions, on foot, with nothing to sustain them but their wits and resourcefulness and the kindness of strangers. Many of their former friends and neighbors had died through all these ordeals. Eventually, and many miles later, they found their way to a camp set up by the United Nations where they were processed as refugees and allowed to live in the overcrowded and inadequate camp. For years they tried to better themselves and make the best life they could, waiting for some country to allow them in. Eventually they met and married in hopes this would make them more acceptable for admittance than as single persons. In time, they were accepted into a European country on a temporary basis where they found jobs, worked hard, and had my brother and me while they pursued applying to enter the United States for a permanent home. America was more open and welcoming then, and after several more years they

were allowed to immigrate. They became productive citizens and taxpayers, dedicated Catholics, responsible parents, and eventually American citizens. And this is how I came to be the blessed and committed American citizen I am today. For this, I am eternally grateful and strive to always give back. Today's refugees are essentially no different than my parents were. They do everything they can just to survive and to find a safe and decent place for themselves and their children. They have no choice but to try anything they can to make that a reality, even if it means going into a strange land to seek asylum or to hide. The difference now is not with the people seeking to come in but that this country is not the America it once was, and that is why we all must try to make things better to again be the life giving country God created us to be.

Questions for journaling:

- ✚ What brought your ancestors to the U.S.? What do you know of their stories?
- ✚ If you found yourself in a situation similar to Rich's parents, how would you feel? What would you do?
- ✚ Take some time to imagine what it was like to live in an overcrowded refugee camp waiting for word as to what country would take you.

Closing Prayer

Merciful Jesus, as an infant your family fled to Egypt to avoid violence and death. You became a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and sustenance. Help us to welcome those like you who cross our borders today. Give us hearts of compassion for all migrants; help us to shape a humane response to their needs and to pass laws and policies that respect the dignity of all who come to our country. Amen.

Actions

- Pray for immigrants, refugees, and all affected by the crisis at our borders.
- Study the immigration issue in more depth. (See resources at the end of this document)
- Participate in vigils, rallies, and other gatherings that advocate for justice for refugees and immigrants.
- Visit or write to immigrants and refugees in detention facilities.
- Assist as volunteers at sites providing immigrant and refugees sanctuary.
- Become involved by writing letters to political leaders to uphold the dignity of life for asylum seekers and other migrants by passing just policies

Week 1: February 18th – 24th

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, creator of all that is. While most of us live in safe homes with at least the basic necessities of life, we know that not everyone does. Those who suffer from inadequate income, food, or safety because of the color of their skin or the country where they live are our neighbors. They may not live next door, but Jesus reminds us that even the stranger is our neighbor. Help us to be generous and welcoming as You have been to us. Show us how. Amen

Food for Thought

From Scripture:

A key event in the history of the Israelites was their enslavement by the Egyptians and liberation by Yahweh, which led to the command to be welcoming of strangers and aliens. Israel's conduct with the stranger is both an imitation of God's care and the primary specific Old Testament expression of the Great Commandment to love one's neighbor. (Lv 19:33- 34, Dt 14:28-29)

Recalling the migration of the Chosen People from Egypt, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph themselves were refugees in Egypt. The Holy Family has become a figure with whom Christian migrants and refugees throughout the ages can identify, giving them hope and courage in hard times. (Mt 2:13-15)

From Papal Teaching

- ✚ In response to the worldwide phenomena of migration, Pius XII reaffirmed the Church's commitment to caring for pilgrims, aliens, exiles, and migrants of every kind. All peoples have the right to conditions worthy of human life, and if these conditions are not present, they have the right to migrate. And while recognizing the right of the sovereign state to control its borders, the Church teaches that this right is not absolute and that the needs of immigrants must be measured against the needs of the receiving countries. (Exsul Familia, 1952)

John Paul II reiterated the rights of migrants and their families and the call to respect human dignity "even in the cases of non-legal immigration" (Ecclesia in America, 1999)

Pope Francis in his message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and refugees writes "we are called to show maximum respect for the dignity of each migrant; this entails accompanying and managing waves of migration as best we can, constructing bridges and not walls, expanding channels for a safe and regular migration. In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important thing is that there always be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote and integrate everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone."

For your Reflection and Journaling:

Spend some quiet time reflecting on the following quotes from scripture. How do they instruct you to treat the stranger? What actions do these quotes personally call you to?

- ✚ You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. **Deuteronomy 10:19**
- ✚ The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. **Leviticus 19:34**
- ✚ For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. **Jeremiah 7:5-7**
- ✚ I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. **Matthew 25:35**
- ✚ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. **Romans 12:13**
- ✚ Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. **Hebrews 13:1-3**

Closing Prayer

Merciful Jesus, as an infant you fled to Egypt with Mary and Joseph. You were a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and sustenance. Help us to welcome those like you who cross our borders today. Give us hearts of compassion for all migrants; help us to shape a humane response to their needs and to pass laws and policies that respect the dignity of all who come to our country. Amen.

Actions

As Marianists and as Christians, what action might we commit to take (individually or as a community) to respond to this issue?

- Pray for immigrants, refugees, and all affected by the crisis at our borders.
- Study the immigration issue in more depth.
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- Visit or write to immigrants and refugees in detention facilities.
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Week 2: February 25th – March 2nd

Opening Prayer

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Food for Thought

The Marianist Charism offers these Five dynamics in working with migrants and refugees:

- A Faith in God that, by prayerfully and gradually doing what we are able to do, justice for immigrants will be achieved.
- A Confidence that Mary will lead us to the ways that her son Jesus calls us to act.
- A Reassurance that our Community Spirit of working together will lead us to discover together and with others what we cannot do alone.
- A Family Spirit with the entire Marianist Family that will give support and enrichment to our efforts.
- A Sense of Mission that enlivens our efforts and brings a joy and determination through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Questions for journaling:

- ✚ Spend some time reflecting on these 5 dynamics and how they might inform your life
- ✚ What in the Marianist Charism pushes you to get involved in migration issues?

Actions

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Week 3: March 3rd – 9th

Opening Prayer

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Food for Thought

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

“The universal common good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to provide for the different needs of men ...alleviating the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world and assisting migrants and their families.” (1911)

The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him.” (2241)

From Catholic Social Teaching

- Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
- Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
- Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.

- Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.
- The human dignity and human rights of the undocumented migrants should be respected.

Questions for Journaling:

- ✚ What part of this summary of Catholic teaching about immigration is new or a surprise to you?
- ✚ What part speaks to you or is particularly challenging to you?
- ✚ What part invites you to learn more or reflect further?
- ✚ What in the Marianist Charism pushes you to get involved in migration issues?

Closing Prayer

Merciful Jesus, as an infant you fled to Egypt with Mary and Joseph. You were a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and sustenance. Help us to welcome those like you who cross our borders today. Give us hearts of compassion for all migrants; help us to shape a humane response to their needs and to pass laws and policies that respect the dignity of all who come to our country. Amen.

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Week 4: March 10th – 16th

Opening Prayer

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Food for Thought

People who study migration speak of two reasons that people leave their homes. They are often called push and pull factors. Pull factors include economic and educational opportunities, religious and political freedom, and the

reunification of families. Push factors often cited include war, violence, poverty, and famine and drought caused by the misuse of lands for economic change, which is related to climate change. Let's explore how these push and pull factors work in a geographic area close to us: Central America.

Brief History of Central American Migration

In order to understand the issue of why people are leaving their homes in Central America and trying to come to the US and why people are sending their children on a perilous journey to a hostile foreign land, we need to learn more about the history of the Central American region. Today, the factors impacting the surge of migrants from Central America include multinational corporations appropriating and misusing land for political gain, political corruption and repression, the violence of drug cartels and gangs, and climate change that has affected the ability for subsistence farmers to grow food for their families. A study of the history of this region shows that US intervention in Central America, which started in the 1950s during the Cold War, has contributed to these problems. The US involvement included the CIA overthrowing the elected government of Guatemala in 1954 and backing right-wing dictators in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua with economic and military aid in the 60's. When the Central American people began to respond to this situation, the US again intervened and supported right-wing military regimes that suppressed the uprisings. In response to death squads and counterinsurgency militias, covertly trained in the US, thousands of Central Americans fled north rather than face the possibility of death for themselves and their children. A quarter of a million people were killed, hundreds of thousands were displaced, and tens of thousands came to the US. These conflicts created many of the push factors which led to the current migration issues.

The Current Push Factors

The current situation in Central America is frightening. Jobs are not available because of abuses of power and land by multinational corporations. Widespread violence from gangs exists; children are threatened with losing their lives or the lives of their family members if they don't join a gang. (For more information about the gang problem and US involvement, see the related link). Women and girls are at risk of being raped or kidnapped and becoming victims of human trafficking. People can't make enough money to feed their families adequately. Parents can't afford to send their children to school because it can cost half of their income.

Reflection Questions

- ✚ How would you feel if faced with the conditions mentioned above? What would you imagine your options to be?
- ✚ What would you risk to get your children out of this situation?
- ✚ As a follower of Jesus and a member of the community of Marianists, how do you feel moved to respond to migrants who leave their country of origin because of the above conditions?
- ✚ Based on the Marianist charism, what would be your personal and political response to this issue?

Closing Prayer

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Week 5: March 17th - 23rd

Opening Prayer

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Food for Thought

Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso issued a pastoral letter titled “Night Will Be No More” in response to the mass shooting at a Walmart in El Paso. The gunman targeted Latinos and left at least 23 dead and 23 injured. Some who were injured fled the scene for fear of being caught without valid documentation recognized by the government of the US.

Quotes from “Night Will Be No More”

4. After prayer and speaking with the People of God in the Church of El Paso, I have decided to write this letter on the theme of racism and white supremacy to reflect together on the evil that robbed us of 23 lives. God can only be calling our community to greater fidelity. Together we are called to discern the new paths of justice and mercy required of us and to rediscover our reasons for hope (cf. 1 Peter 3, 5).

12. This mystery of evil also includes the base belief that some of us are more important, deserving, and worthy than others. It includes the ugly conviction that this country and its history and opportunities and resources, as well as our economic and political life, belong more properly to “white” people than to people of color. This is a perverse way of thinking that divides people based on heritage and tone of skin into “us” and “them,” “worthy” and “unworthy,” paving the way to dehumanization. In other words, racism.

13. Racism can make a home in our hearts, distort our imagination and will, and express itself in individual actions of hatred and discrimination. Racism is one’s failure to give others the respect they are due on account of being created in the image and likeness of God. And it is more than that.

14. If we are honest, racism is really about advancing, shoring up, and failing to oppose a system of white privilege and advantage based on skin color. When this system begins to shape our public choices, structure our common life together, and becomes a tool of class, this is rightly called institutionalized racism. Action to build this system of hate and inaction to oppose its dismantling are what we rightly call white supremacy. This is the evil one and the “father of lies” (Jn 8, 44), incarnate in our everyday choices and lifestyles and our laws and institution

Questions for Journaling:

- ✚ Have you personally linked the issues surrounding immigration and refugees with racism and white supremacy? Why or why not?
- ✚ Reflect on how you feel when you think about racism and white supremacy, which are condemned by our church, are so closely linked with the immigration policies of our country?
- ✚ What actions could you envision taking to encourage reform of the current immigration policies?

Closing Prayer

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Week 6: Holy Week

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, creator of all that is. While most of us live in safe homes with at least the basic necessities of life, we know that not everyone does. Those who suffer from inadequate income, food, or safety because of the color of their skin or the country where they live are our neighbors. They may not live next door, but Jesus reminds us that even the stranger is our neighbor. Help us to be generous and welcoming as You have been to us. Show us how. Amen.

Food for Thought

Holy Week takes us on the journey of Jesus to Golgotha and his death on the cross. The last gathering Jesus has with all his followers called each of them to serve one another. This call is reenacted with the washing of the feet at our Holy Thursday Liturgy. The call to serve one another hopefully has informed all of us in our journey these last 5 weeks. Perhaps you have found some way to answer this call to service in the actions listed each week. If not, maybe this video will inspire you to think about what you can do to improve the lives of today's immigrants and refugees.

https://www.ted.com/talks/becca_heller_a_safe_pathway_to_resettlement_for_migrants_and_refugees

Closing Prayer

A Pope's Prayer for Immigrants by Pope Francis

Merciful God, we pray to you for all the men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life.

Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished.

May we never forget them, but honor their sacrifice with deeds more than words. We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.

Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through our tenderness and protection.

In caring for them may we seek a world where none are forced to leave their home and where all can live in freedom, dignity and peace.

Merciful God and Father of all, wake us from the slumber of indifference, open our eyes to their suffering, and free us from the insensitivity born of worldly comfort and self-centeredness.

Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters.

May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.

Resource Created by the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative's Immigrant Justice Issue Team. You can read more about this team, and the organization, here: <https://marianistsjc.net/immigrant-justice-issue-team>. Contact us at info@marianistsjc.net.

