

The Immigration Experience: A Personal Reflection

Ramon Garcia

This summer OCSJM has been pleased to welcome Ramon Garcia, a Seminarian for the Archdiocese of Hartford who has spent the summer working as a CCHD-sponsored Intern at the Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry. Among other tasks, he has had opportunities to visit with CCHD-funded projects in our diocese, and to see first-hand the struggles faced by some of those who live on the fringes of our society. He has also visited with Pastors across the archdiocese to talk with them about the mission and goals of CCHD, and to encourage parish support of its efforts to address root causes and break the cycle of poverty.

Ramon will begin his fourth year of theological Studies in the fall at St. John Seminary in Boston, MA, and will be ordained a deacon in preparation for Priesthood. His home parish is St. Matthew Church in Forestville. He shares reflections here on his own experience of immigration, and the current situations in the United States.

As a young child, I immigrated with my family to the United States from Nicaragua. At the time, the country had become embroiled in a bitter war due to the Sandinista revolution. This war forced many Nicaraguans to flee their native country to seek refuge in nearby countries including the United States. The United States, likely because it had played a role in the war, was willing to receive many of these refugees, even granting some of them political asylum, as my family was fortunate to receive.

In the same way today, many refugees from Central American countries have come to the United States to escape the violence my family was running from many years ago. Sadly, the United States has decided to “close its borders” and not receive these refugees. Some Americans have gone as far as to hold signs which say “you are not welcome.” It is a sad state to consider that for some of these refugees, many of whom are children and have had to come at great risk to themselves and even suffer abuse along the way, the very first thing they see when they step foot on this great country of the United States is a sign which says “you are not welcome.”

In sacred scripture, we also read of refugees. We read of a family from Nazareth running from violence. Joseph and Mary, along with a newborn baby Jesus, fled to Egypt to escape the violence of Herod who was killing infants. Although nothing is told of the Nazareth family’s encounters in Egypt, we are hard pressed to imagine that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph would have gotten along in Egypt without the benevolence, compassion, and charity of the peoples that lived in Egypt at the time. It is this same charity which the United States and Mexican bishops had in mind when they issued a joint pastoral letter on the problem of immigration entitled [*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*](#). In this letter, one of the principles the bishops promote is that “refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.”

In a Papal Audience in July of 2013 on the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, where thousands of migrants have died crossing the sea from Africa, Pope Francis affirmed sentiments about the treatment of refugees and immigrants which can be applied to the current border crisis situation in the United States. Pope Francis stated, “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. And their cry rises up to God! How much these people have suffered! Some of them never made it here.”

Of course there are many factors that need to be taken into consideration when allowing refugees and immigrants into a country including logistical and economic factors. It is not my intention to undermine these in any way. We should always bear in mind, however, that these factors, whatever they may be, are always usurped by charity--- for it is by this charity that we will be judged in the Kingdom. That is, the compassion and mercy we show at the gates of our borders, will be the same compassion and mercy which we will be shown at the gates in Heaven.