



February 3, 2017

Letter on Welcoming the Stranger

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Several actions have been taken and executive orders promulgated in the opening days of the new administration, some of which we applaud and some of which are cause for concern for us as Christian believers.

We are able to applaud those actions which are meant to protect the unborn, and we were delighted at the presence of the Vice President at this year's March for Life. These are positive developments and hopeful signs.

Yet, as a Pro-Life Church, we know that the demands of the Gospel of Life that we preach continue after the birth of our children and extend beyond our national borders.

Let me be clear, the United States has every right to and should secure its borders as a way to protect us from harm. This right is a basic teaching of our Church. Yet, many of my brother bishops and I have serious concerns about those executive orders that would make it difficult, if not impossible in some instances, for us to carry out our call from Jesus to welcome strangers and fulfill the commandment of love: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). This is critical for us, since the Lord says he will judge us at the end of time on the basis of how we treated our brothers and sisters during our time on earth. As Jesus told us, "Whatever you did not do for one of these least brothers of mine, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Indeed, there are people, our brothers and sisters, who are fleeing for their lives after experiencing life-threatening terrorism or extreme hardship in their home countries. Some are young, some are old, some are Muslim, and many are Christian. They are looking for a place of shelter, comfort and peace for themselves and their families. We would do the same in similar circumstances. There are innocent people who are knocking at our door asking for safe shelter. We should not reject their needs like the wealthy man who rejected poor Lazarus sitting just outside his door (Luke 16:19-31). America has been and must continue to be a place of refuge for people such as these.

I am gratified to know that Catholic Christians in America have been among the most welcoming people, knowing that nearly all of us have come from immigrant families ourselves.

At one time, our forebears fled the hardships of their homes from many countries around the world. I think of this when I read the Scripture passage that gives God’s law to His people: “When a foreigner resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the foreigner who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the foreigner as yourself; for you too were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34).

The issue of welcoming refugees while protecting our borders is a complicated one, as is indicated by the strong differences of opinion about it in our country today. As followers of the teachings of Jesus, we must continually bring the light of his Gospel to our discussions surrounding this and other difficult, complex matters. Balancing the reasonable and appropriate measures we need to take to ensure the safety of our citizens while at the same time fulfilling the Gospel mandate to extend our compassion to others may not always be easy or simple; but, it is both necessary and obtainable when people of good will work together.

Recently our Sunday Gospel was taken from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapter 5). In it, Jesus reminded us that we will be blessed if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, show mercy and make peace. If we pray — and we should — God will give us the wisdom to know what is right and the courage to live in justice and love with others who share our common world. This is the only way to find true blessing. This is the only way to true and lasting peace.

Finally, I pray to God that we will make good moral decisions on behalf of our citizens, as well as the many new refugees and immigrants who are seeking safety or a better way of life in our country. As Christians who believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we have been given the freedom in the Spirit to discern what is right and do what is good. As Jesus said to his disciples who were being tossed about during a storm: “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (Matthew 14:27).

Peace to you and blessings upon those you love.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Edward C. Malesic

The Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic, JCL
Bishop of Greensburg

Resources:

A statement from the USCCB president and vice president is at

<http://www.usccb.org/news/2017/17-027.cfm>

To help refugees, especially those from war-torn Syria, go to Catholic Relief Services —

www.crs.org — or the Catholic Near East Welfare Association — www.cnewa.org