

Migrants All/

Today's gospel lesson takes us to that time in the life of the holy family when they had to flee their homeland and become refugees in a foreign country.

Let's begin with our gospel lesson, shall we?

A lesson perfectly timed for this season of new beginnings and new travels among the faithful.

Today's gospel lesson is all about the travels of Mary, Joseph and Jesus — seeking a safe haven shortly after Jesus is born.

It's fitting that we begin our journey together — by remembering the journey of the holy family.

And by remembering that the entire story of our faith, from Abraham to the great commission given by Jesus to his disciples to spread his message throughout the whole world — is a story about human migration.

With the exception of our African siblings, we are all migrants.

Some migrated thousands of years ago out of Africa to lands in which they've stayed so long that they became indigenous.

Others migrated more recently and still others continue to do so today.

It's the defining story of humanity.

Abraham left his hometown and everything he knew — to go to a place as yet unknown.

Had he refused to leave the place where he felt safe and familiar, we wouldn't be here today.

We have a God who calls us out of our comfortable places.

Who challenges us to begin a journey to places as yet unknown.

Which is why it's so ironic that migrants are routinely demonized today, particularly by those who claim to be followers of Jesus.

Migrants embody the essential nature of who we are as God's people.

People on the move.

Rather than demonizing, perhaps we ought to be welcoming them.

This is particularly true for the vast number of migrants coming from Central America.

What too many forget is that Central America is filled with rich, lush farmland.

Until our giant agricultural businesses stole the best lands, the people there were self-sustaining for centuries.

When American corporations stole the best farmland so that we can have cheap fruit in the United States, when our government repeatedly installed repressive regimes in these countries to keep the people in line, only then did economic pressure build to such a point that we have the mass migration occurring today.

This is not something for which the people who are migrating are to blame.

It's rather a matter of collective responsibility and indeed collective guilt — for the United States.

If those rich farmlands were returned to the people they were stolen from, you'd see a dramatic drop in migration from that part of the world.

And yet too many refuse to face historical facts.

Too many refuse to take current action to rectify historical wrongs.

It's so much easier to demonize the victims than to acknowledge our role in creating the catastrophe that now exists.

Indeed, yesterday's illegal overthrow and kidnapping of Maduro of Venezuela is a stark return to the bad old days of American imperialism.

How ironic that we who have prided ourselves on our free and democratic society, in which every adult has a vote and a voice,

have spent decades undermining that very same right in the countries to our immediate south.

That Jesus and Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt, the very place that the Jewish people escaped from, a place of slavery, has its own sense of irony.

The former slaveholding state of Egypt becomes a safe haven for the holy family.

This irony resonates in the headlines of today as migrants are vilified in our country.

A country previously known as the one who entreats the world to "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."

And here we are today, with ICE agents swooping down in helicopters onto Chicago apartment buildings.

Seizing people in courtrooms.

Seizing people even at swearing in ceremonies in federal courts, then deporting them.

Sending others to countries they've no connection with — others going to gulags in El Salvador and Alligator Alcatraz.

All "justified" by a perverse form of the faith called "Christian nationalism" which seeks to ensure that only white men occupy and

rule this country; with all others relegated to positions of servitude to the white masters.

More than ever today we Christians are called to step out of our comfort zone.

We are called to take up the journey toward God's kingdom.

A kingdom that is rooted in mercy, compassion, justice, and kindness.

A kingdom that is founded on the proposition that all human beings are siblings to one another.

That our common human destiny — is unity with God.

Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk, peacemaker, mystic and prolific author experienced this very truth as he stood at an ordinary street corner one Spring day in Louisville, Kentucky.

He says:

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.

It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation, into a special world.

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me — that I almost laughed out loud.

I have the immense joy of being human!

A member of a race in which God's own self became incarnate.

As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are.

And if only everybody could realize this!

But it cannot be explained.

There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around — shining like the sun.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach.

The core of their reality.

The person that each one is — in God's eyes.

If only they could all see themselves as they really are.

If only we could see each other that way — all the time.

There would be no more war.

No more hate.

No more cruelty.

No more greed.

We can't see it.

We can only believe it and 'understand' it, like a peculiar gift.

Thomas Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, modified.

Merton was graced with that glimpse of insight into our true identity.

An identity that we cover up with egotism and nationalism and racism and bigotry and fear.

Always fear.

Fear is what keeps us blind to one another and fear is what motivates the current horrors occurring in our country.

Fear is the enemy of faith.

It's no wonder that scripture says, some 365 times, once for each day of the year, "Fear not!"

It is in fact the most common phrase in all of holy scripture.

Why's that?

Because our natural tendency IS to be afraid.

So it takes the awakening of faith, whether like Paul, getting knocked on his backside by some momentous event or, as most of us come to faith, through a slow awakening as life throws its slings and arrows at us.

But no matter how we get there, this life of faith is absolutely necessary if we are going to be faithful to the God who sustains us.

If we are to experience the life that truly is life.

As we begin our new journey this year, let's set fear aside, trusting that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... may give us all a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know him, so that, with the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which he has called us, ... and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for those who believe."

+amen