

August 16, 2020 | 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

[IS 56:1, 6-7](#)

[PS 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8](#)

[Rom 11:13-15, 29-32](#)

[MT 15:21-28](#)

By Bro. Steve Herro, O.Praem.

I am immediately struck by a common thread in the First Reading and the Gospel. In both passages, foreigners (non-Jews) are exalted for “loving the name of the Lord” in the First Reading and demonstrating great personal faith in Jesus as Lord and devotion to a sick child (Gospel). Honoring the foreigner has great implications for our faith communities today. If God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament embrace the foreigner, so should we.

Less than five years ago, I was a lay ecclesial minister in a Catholic parish. Perhaps my strongest memory of my service was of a drawn-out battle during a Worship Committee meeting. Our committee was very divided over whether we should celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe during a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass the weekend of the Feast. The parish had a small but growing and faith-filled Hispanic population. We struggled to incorporate the immigrant community with the Anglo community in our parish.

With the support of the pastor, I proposed that we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a parish community during a regularly scheduled Mass usually attended by Anglos only. As I explained at the meeting, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe was the most significant cultural and religious holiday for our Hispanic population, the national Catholic population was becoming more Hispanic, and Our Lady of Guadalupe was not only the patron saint of the Mexican Church, she is also the Patroness of the Americas. By honoring our Lady of Guadalupe during a Mass usually attended only by Anglos would begin to demonstrate honor to the foreign Catholic population in our community.

One committee member attempted to compromise by allowing the cultural celebration of the Mexican Catholic parishioners during their once a month Mass ONLY. There was no way that their culture could infringe on a regularly scheduled Anglo Mass. When I reminded the committee that the proposal was for a single liturgy over the course of the entire year, an opponent interjected, “But if we give in once, they will ask for more later.” And that is when I bitterly replied with great sarcasm, “And that is right, isn’t it? If English were good enough for Jesus, it should be good enough for us.”

It is tragic that a dominant memory of my experience in ministry with a particular congregation is based on the inability of some members of our parish to welcome foreigners in our midst. Unfortunately, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s admission that our churches were one of the most segregated American venues on a given Sunday morning was true in the 1950s and 1960s. And, we still have a long way to go in 2020.

Welcoming the foreigner and acknowledging his or her contributions to our society has also become a stumbling block in negotiating COVID aid legislation. I am writing this as Republican and Democratic legislative leaders are negotiating our fourth COVID emergency aid bill. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Justice for Immigrants campaign [lists necessary components](#) for this COVID aid bill:

- 1) Automatically extend work authorization and visa renewal deadlines for refugees and immigrants who are providing economic and recovery assistance to our country (particularly DACA recipients, TPS holders, and essential workers);
- 2) Provide no-cost COVID-19 testing and treatment for all, regardless of immigration status as this is a public safety issue;
- 3) Ensure that many hardworking struggling immigrant and refugee populations are eligible for stimulus payments;
- 4) Halt the implementation of the new public charge rules; and
- 5) Appropriate \$642 million in supplemental funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to care for vulnerable migrant populations living in the United States.

May our August 16, 2020 scriptures inspire all of us to raise the bar on the just treatment of newcomers in our churches, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, media reporting, sports fields, and halls of government.

Steve professed solemn vows as a Norbertine brother of St. Norbert Abbey (De Pere, Wisc.) in 1991. He blogs at stevenherro.wordpress.com and is an archivist for the Diocese of Green Bay and Executive Assistant for the Bay Area Community Council. He enjoys reading, gardening, bicycling, and social policy advocacy grounded in Catholic social teaching.