

A MEDITATION GUIDE FOR LENT

Regardless of political affiliation, most Americans believe that something must be done about the flood of undocumented immigrants and refugees entering the country. Our asylum system is over-stressed, and measures taken by the last two administrations have adversely impacted the treatment of those entering from both a legal and humanitarian perspective. There is also a great deal of misinformation and vitriolic rhetoric that makes it difficult to appreciate what is really happening and how these desperate people are being received.

Call To Action's Immigration WorkGroup conducted a campaign during the four months leading up to the November election to inform you of immigration-related issues. Wise decisions arise from people who have accurate, truthful information about current events.

We cannot forget that we are Catholics who share strong values and social teachings taught to us by scripture. We have obligations to welcome and assist the "stranger in our midst."

We now offer the Beatitudes given to us by Jesus as our guide along our Lenten journey. There is no greater Gospel of compassion. We will use the plight of immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers as our guide to increase that spirit of compassion.

The power of communal prayer is incredible. That is the basis for our traditions of novenas and missions and observations of the Stations of the Cross and recitations of the Rosary. We will introduce each Beatitude with a scripture reading and offer a closing prayer to ask for Divine assistance for our brothers and sisters who are desperate for welcome, seeking only opportunities for themselves and safety for their families.

We invoke God's power to guide us.



As part of your contemplation of each Beatitude, we encourage you to do two things:

First: ask yourself when you experienced treatment like that being given to immigrants. None of us has gotten through life thus far without being the object of discrimination or unfair treatment. How did it feel?

Second: what can you do to help change the behaviors of others towards immigrants? Will you share these meditations? Can you speak to your friends and neighbors about understanding? Can you assist at a refugee shelter or in a soup kitchen? Can you contribute gently used clothing or money to local organizations?

The First Beatitude

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Humans have been fleeing oppression and persecution, environmental disasters, and poverty for thousands of years. Some seek simply to live, others to find new opportunities for themselves and their families. And for just as long, there has been resistance to the “intruders” even though the residents of that nation got there the same way and for the same reasons.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Judge with true justice, and show kindness and compassion toward each other. Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the resident alien or the poor; do not plot evil against one another in your hearts (*Zechariah 7:9-10*).

Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers For They Too Are Children of God

The similarity between an artist’s rendering of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where he gave us the Beatitudes and a photograph taken of refugees at the Texas border is stunning. For so many, the United States is their “kingdom of heaven.”



Collective Prayer

Beloveds, God does not abandon us to the systems that destroy.

God does not bind us to our regrets.

Or forever hold us to what we once believed.

God says, come and follow!

Know forgiveness and sin no more.

Love abounds. And Justice will run down like a mighty river!

Wherever new life is desired,

may the peace of Christ be welcomed among us.

Thanks be to God who leads us on paths of resurrection.

The Second Beatitude

Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The Beatitudes are a beautiful guide to compassion and deeper appreciation of migrant issues and events at our borders. Psalm 34, verse 18 offers an introduction to the Second Beatitude:

YHWH is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

**Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers
For they are our Spirit Brothers and Sisters.**

Imagine having to give up everything and setting out on foot for a nation thousands of miles away. Your family is starving, your lives are endangered, and there is no other choice. You cannot stay. You leave in sorrow, but you also embrace the hope of a future. Imagine the dangers of the journey and finally, crossing a river with a wall on the other side. Now, imagine your child drowning in a wild stream or holding your wife as she dies from a stray bullet. Death was certain if you had stayed at home, but this is cruel indeed.



If there are places in our hearts for these people, surely there are places in our country for them. They are not a threat; they do not bring disease or crime or hatred with them. All they seek is a chance to be part of “the land of the free and the brave.” Let us welcome and comfort those who make it to our shores.

Collective Prayer

God of truth, in your wisdom, enlighten us.
God of hope, in your kindness, heal us.
Creator of all people, in your generosity, guide us.

Grounded in faith, hope and love,
May the sharing of our lives in these graced moments
Call each one of us
To take one step closer
To being changed
For good.

The Third Beatitude

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

As we consider the Third Beatitude, let us reflect on the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat;
The calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them (*Isaiah 11:6*).

**Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers
For they show us the meaning of faith and hope.**

We see gentleness and humility in the children that make up 13% of the migrant and refugee population. They have no agenda other than survival and a future life. They are not aggressive or hostile, just innocent and dependent. They are beautiful, laugh though fearful, and show love and protectiveness for their siblings.



Children are the future of the world. They will inherit a planet and society that we help create. Do we want this future to belong to selfish power-seekers, or to those who stand up for truth and right? The Border Patrol agent above is obviously far more concerned with caring for a child in distress than his authority over the family in front of him. He is showing that meekness is not weakness, that compassion is strength, and that power can be a force for good.

Jesus told us, “Let the children come to me and do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (*Matthew 18:16*). The migrants and refugees and asylum seekers see the United States as akin to the kingdom of God when compared to their homelands. We must open our hearts and our doors to them.

Collective Prayer

God of abundant life,
Motivated by our passion to welcome our brothers and sisters at the border,
We strive to embrace the challenges of our lives and our world.
We ask you to bless us with strength to seek justice,
With wisdom to care for all of creation that shares the universe with us,
With love to bring forth new life.

The Fourth Beatitude

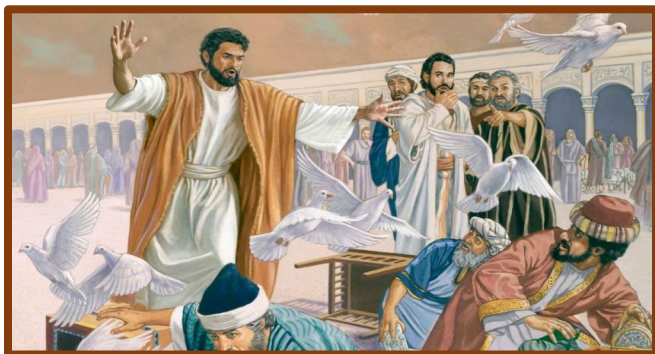
***Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.***

Our scripture introduction to the Fourth Beatitude is provided by *Psalms 146:8-9*.

YHWH raises up those who are bowed down;
YHWH loves the righteous.
YHWH protects the resident alien,
comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow,
but thwarts the way of the wicked.

**Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers.
They show us that the price of freedom is not too high.**

Jesus cleansed the temple of the money changers and those selling doves (*Mark 11:15-17*), a display of righteous anger against what he called “a den of thieves.” We see the same kind of righteous anger in the protests against law enforcement methods that separate families or provide inhumane shelter conditions, against policies that make asylum difficult to even apply for much less to attain, against vigilantes and razor wire and deportation without legal representation or the ability to make and appeal for clemency.



We are starting to see hard-core anti-immigrant positions soften as people realize that migrants provide willing workers for many dangerous and unpleasant jobs, that their presence results in lower crime rates, and that dying towns are being revitalized and energized by their presence and involvement in community affairs.

Collective Prayer

Jesus our Redeemer, today you call us to welcome the members of God's family who come to our land to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, violence, and war. Like your disciples, we too are filled with fear and doubt and even suspicion. We build barriers in our hearts and in our minds. By your grace, help us to banish fear from our hearts, that we may embrace each of your children as our own brother and sister; that we may welcome migrants and refugees with joy and generosity, while responding to their many needs. Help us to realize that you call all people to your holy mountain to learn the ways of peace and justice. May we share of our abundance as you spread a banquet before us, and may we give witness to your love for all people as we celebrate the many gifts they bring.

We praise you and give you thanks for the family you have called together from so many people. We see in this human family a reflection of the divine unity of the one most Holy Trinity in whom we make our prayer.

The Fifth Beatitude

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Sometimes Scripture describes conditions heart-wrenchingly similar to what we see at the border.

The thought of my wretched homelessness
is wormwood and poison;
Remembering it over and over,
my soul is downcast.
But this I will call to mind;
therefore I will hope:
YHWH's acts of mercy are not exhausted;
YHWH's compassion is not spent;
They are renewed each morning –
great is your faithfulness.
(Lamentations 3:19-23)

**Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers
for they seek their land of milk and honey in our “nation of immigrants.”**



In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, we are treated to Portia's soliloquy on mercy:

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes

On mercy, “It is twice blest” These are the feelings that we need to see spread across our nation, those of self-worth that comes from helping another human being in need. There is an old saying that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” In exactly the same way, being merciful lifts all souls. It is a blessing for both “him that gives and him that takes.”

Collective Prayer

GOD of truth, in your wisdom, enlighten us.
GOD of hope, in your kindness, heal us.
CREATOR of all people, in your generosity, guide us.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

The Sixth Beatitude

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

Jesus often used statements and concepts of the prophets who preceded him. So too it is with the Beatitudes.

Who has the right to ascend YHWH's mountain?
Who is allowed to enter YHWH's holy place?
Those whose hands are clean
and whose hearts are pure,
who do not worship idols or make false promises.
YHWH will bless them;
YHWH their savior will declare them innocent (*Psalms 24:3-5*).

Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers for their sufferings and trials in pursuit of a future.

We all have an instant understanding of what “[pure of heart](#)” means. But what did Jesus mean? He almost certainly meant the spiritual center of life, where thoughts, desires, sense of purpose, will, understanding, and character reside. So, to be pure in heart means to possess an inner being of mercy, compassion, nonviolence, and peace. It is more than external behavior; it is an internal integrity of a loving soul.



The vast majority of our migrant brothers and sisters do not hide why they run -- why they run **from** poverty, oppression and hopelessness; why they run **toward** a sustainable life for themselves and their families. The facts that migrant communities in the U.S. have lower crime rates, greater revitalization of businesses, more joy, better school attendance, higher tax revenues, and growing church populations speak for themselves.

Collective Prayer

God of vision,
We long to see your face
And are afraid to see it;
We long to break the grip of suffering,
And we cannot cast it out.
Uncover our faces
And expose us to your glory,
That we may comprehend the poor
In their suffering and insight,
And the world may be transfigured in you. (*Janet Morley*)

The Seventh Beatitude

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

In a world ravaged by wars and tyranny, God holds out the promise of peace for those so afflicted.

For a child is born to us, a son is given us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.
His dominion is vast
and forever peaceful (*Isaiah 9:5-6*).

**Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers
They only ask us to give them a chance, not charity.**

Joseph forgave his brothers after being sold into slavery in Egypt, and Jonathan pledged unity with David despite the animosity of Saul. These are classic Biblical examples of setting aside hatred to embrace peace, and those who have done so have always been favored by God with manifold rewards in their lives. Jesus, the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah (above), is the ultimate peacemaker. What else would we expect from the Son of God? We repeat his words, "Peace be with you," multiple times during Mass. Militarization of our borders, mobilization of armed militias and vigilantes, and incarceration of children and families is anathema to the will and Word of God. Turn not your palm outward as a sign of deterrence, but hold your hand out, palm up, to help, to lift those oppressed and beaten and seeking opportunity. Peace to all children of God!



Collective Prayer

Lord God, help us to remember those who tonight will go to sleep unfed and unwelcome, strangers in foreign lands, people who have fled for their lives and are far from their homes.

We lift up to you those who are escaping persecution and conflict, having fled death, torture or ruthless exploitation.

Lord Jesus, give us more of your compassion for their plight, soften our hearts to their situation, and help us follow your lead in seeking justice and mercy on their behalf.

We give thanks for people working in troubled countries and ask for more of your blessing so we can bring life, dignity and hope to those who remain.

We thank you that you are Lord of all the earth and all its people are loved by you.
We pray these things in the name of your Son who was himself born into the troubled life of a refugee.

The Eighth Beatitude

***Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

As we conclude our journey through the Beatitudes, we might ponder the Wisdom of Ben Sira.

Resident alien stranger, foreigner, pauper –
their glory is the fear of YHWH.
It is not right to despise anyone wise but poor,
nor proper to honor the lawless.
The prince, the ruler, the judge are in honor;
but none is greater than the one who fears YHWH (*Sirach 10:22-24*).

**Blessed are ... Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers
They understand that they follow in the footsteps of the Holy Family.**

Ben Sira tells us it is “not proper to honor the lawless.” But who is lawless? Was it the innocent Messiah who was murdered because he defied the worn traditions of the Sanhedrin? Or was it the tyrant who allowed himself to give in to a mob rather than judging fairly on the evidence? Is it the migrant fleeing hopelessness, starvation, cartels and gangs, violence in the streets, and oppression by those in power? Or is it those who condone or order the use of inappropriate force, cruel measures, inhuman and unsanitary conditions, taking children away from parents? Which are the ones who fear God and should be “honored among God’s people?” (*Sirach 10:20*)



Collective Prayer

We pray that we discover not only ourselves and God but also our neighbors. We profess that our neighbor is our sister or brother living alongside us. We pray for the joyful recognition that being human means being together.

We pray for the compassion that grows with the inner recognition that our neighbor shares our humanity, for a partnership that cuts through all walls which might have kept us separate. We pray that across all barriers of land and language, wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, we accept that we are one, created from the same dust, subject to the same laws, and destined for the same end. We say, “In the face of the oppressed I recognize my own face and in the hands of the oppressor I recognize my own hands In the depths of my being, I meet my fellow humans with whom I share love and hate, life and death.”

We dare to acknowledge our mutual destiny so that we might move forward, all together, into the land which God is showing us. Amen.

(Adapted from *With Open Hands* by Fr. Henri J. M. Nouwen)

CONCLUSION

The goal of the Immigration Workgroup is “conversion to immersion,” that is, converting skeptics to believers in the justice and honor of migrant support and encouraging subsequent immersion in community efforts to assist them through all legal means possible, including the fight for those legal rights. The proliferation of local efforts to this end extends across the nation, not merely at the southern border. For example:

- In September of 2023, New York Mayor Eric Adams announced that the influx of immigrants would “destroy New York City.” It did not happen. Although many challenges remain, there are positive signs that the dire prediction was wrong. In the basement of the Metro Baptist Church in Midtown Manhattan, migrants from a dozen countries work side-by-side in the kitchen, sharing their indigenous dishes, and building a community that contrast sharply with shelters, protests, and bureaucratic blocks. This was initiated by the nonprofit Artists Athletes Activists with no paid employees, little financial support and only the desire to help. And not to be outdone by the McAllen, Texas, organization, Catholic Charities of New York is welcoming arrivals (often the first contact in NY), assisting with legal affairs, and providing education assistance and activities for children.
- In Omaha, Nebraska, Omaha Welcomes the Stranger, Inc., helps asylum seekers from all over the world. It is a network that extends to Juarez, Mexico and is modeled after El Paso’s Annunciation House. Three religious communities are involved in providing shelter (nine families live there now), finding housing, and helping to find employment for migrants.
- Our Lady of Victory in Baltimore was one of dozens of parishes that were proposed to close because of dwindling Mass attendance. Situated on 13 acres, the church was a multi-generational, multi-national parish that started a community garden that yields produce to stock the food pantry serving 50-60 people each week. Joining long-standing parishioners in tending the garden were five newly arrived Burmese families. They reached out to other immigrant families living in the area and drew them into the parish despite language barriers. On May 22, the parish found out that it would remain open.
- The Michigan Farmworker Project began as an academic study for farmworkers in the state but now is helping to create sustainable policies, programs and health-promoting interventions to improve the work and living conditions for the workers. They are illuminating policies and practices that deny migrant workers social and labor protections afforded to other worker populations. Their public relations efforts are making a difference. The efforts that were started by Caesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta continue.

Many believe that immigrants, particularly undocumented ones, are a drain on the government’s resources while contributing nothing. However, a new study from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy shows that the opposite is true. In 2022, they paid \$96.7 billion in taxes, of which \$60 billion went to the federal government. More than a third of the taxes these immigrants pay go toward programs they cannot access, such as Social Security (\$25.7 billion), Medicare (\$6.4 billion), and unemployment insurance (\$1.8 billion). In 40 states, undocumented immigrants pay higher state and local taxes than the top 1% of households. They also cannot receive many tax credits, often don’t realize that they can claim refunds, and rarely have access to tax help. Work authorization would be a win-win: Giving undocumented immigrants work authorization would result in an increase of their tax contributions from \$40 billion to \$137 billion per year since work authorization would increase wages.

Collective Prayer

Loving God, help us to remember the words of Jesus, “Whoever receives me receives the one who sent me; for the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest” (*Luke 9:48*). Give us the strength to act on behalf of your Son to welcome the stranger, to open our hearts to them in the spirit of Jesus’ Beatitudes, and to accept that we are all made in his image. Amen.