

## That We May Be One: Reflections on the Share the Journey Campaign

By Archbishop John C. Wester, People of God, October 2017

Several years ago, I heard a very important story that happened in the life of Sr. Marilyn Lacey, a sister of the Bay Area of San Francisco, and relative of the late Monsignor Lacey, former Vicar General of San Francisco. Sr. Marilyn's ministry was to welcome refugees and others from the airport and then she would help orient them to the area. I remember her telling the story of greeting a woman who came in exhausted, having traveled many, many thousands of miles, and going through the long, involved vetting process of coming in to our country as refugee. Sr. Marilyn asked if this newly arrived, refugee woman was hungry and she answered, "Yes, I am." Sr. Marilyn got some food and placed them in front of her, but she didn't eat it. Sr. Marilyn said, "I'm sorry, is the food okay?" "Oh," the woman said, "it looks wonderful. I'm very hungry." And sister said, "Well, may I ask, why aren't you eating?" The woman simply looked up to the sister and said, "But where are the others? Where are the others?" Sister said, "What others?" The woman replied, "Well, in my country, we would never ever eat alone. Eating is a communal activity. As a matter of fact, if you ate alone, it might be seen as a sign that you were hoarding and being selfish. We always eat with each other, strangers, friends, family."

This story speaks of communion. It speaks of unity. And this really is at the heart of the Gospel, Matthew 25. The primary focus of what Jesus is telling us in this Gospel is union with Him, and with our neighbor. Jesus is saying that if you don't accept those whom I send, you don't accept Me. It's one in the same. Jesus is uniting Himself with us. We are called to love both God and neighbor. You cannot love God and not neighbor, or the other way around.

This union with Christ and man's unity with our brothers and our sisters with all human beings is fundamental to who we are. Now we know there are some over the years who have said that religion is the opioid of the masses, but actually, true religion, authentic religion, is perhaps our greatest challenge and offers our greatest reward. It's not a crutch. It's a demand to love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as our self. It is in this spirit that Pope Francis has inaugurated the "Share the Journey Campaign," to live out this call of love God and of each other. For the coming two years, Pope Francis has asked us to specially focus on the stories of immigrants and refugees.

Many issues come up regarding the legal process of vetting refugees, and about our broken immigration system. In the face of these challenges, the words of St. John Paul II come to mind. He said, "An irregular legal status cannot allow the migrant to lose his or her dignity since that migrant is endowed with inalienable rights that can neither be violated nor ignored." Yes, we must work for comprehensive immigration reform, we must do all that we can, but our first duty is to be one with Christ and one with our immigrant brothers and sisters. Jesus tells us that if we want to be one with Him, we have to be one with each other.

This unity between Christ and ourselves is key to who we are as humans. I'm fond of quoting John Pierre de Caussade, a 17<sup>th</sup> century French Jesuit priest, who says, "Jesus Christ lives in everything, works throughout history to the end of time, that every fraction of a second, every atom of matter, contains a fragment of His hidden life, and His secret activity." How much more so, then in our immigrant brothers and sisters.

And furthermore, we're made in the very image and likeness of God. In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* we read, "Since something of the glory of God shines on the face of every person, the dignity of the every person before God is the basis of the dignity of human beings before other human beings." This notion then that we all have equal dignity because we're created in the image and likeness of God is central to our social teaching and is central to our teaching about immigrants. All of us reflect the image of God. There's our unity with God with Christ. And since we all reflect this image, we are one. It's the same image, each one of us. As a matter of fact, when we all come together, the image of God is most complete. And when we refuse to welcome the stranger in our midst, the image of God is marred and fragmented and incomplete.

And a final connection is that Jesus joins us through the medium of suffering. He surrenders Himself and 'became one of us not gaining equality with God something to be grasped.' That's suffering, letting go, surrendering. And He died on the cross for us that we might have eternal life. That Jesus that raises us in judgment at the end of time - raises a hand with a nail hole in it, to symbolize his unity with all humanity. Because all of us suffer, and Christ suffers with us.

And so these are some of the ways that we're one with Christ and one with each other. And we know that the Church has a special place in her heart for the poor, sometimes called a "preferential option for the poor." And that is I believe, because the poor are the ones most in danger of not being united with us. They are the ones most in danger of dying of

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starvation, of disease, of being forgotten, of being trafficked, of being beaten down. It is the poor that we must reach out to first, and gathering to be with us. And clearly, it's hard to imagine anyone who can be poorer than immigrants or refugees, with nowhere to lay their head, and quite often no laws to protect them, and sadly, sometimes, in some places, no warm welcome.

And so, our Holy Father asks us to journey together with our fellow pilgrims for these two years and beyond, so that we might give witness, advocate, pray and learn so that all of us together might be fellow pilgrims. I think Pope Francis actually gave us a beautiful context for these two years. Remember when he came to visit our country, not long ago and spoke before the joint sessions of Congress. He said, "we the people of this continent are not fearful of foreigners because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you were also descended from foreigners. Let us remember the Golden Rule. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we wish to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security. If we want life, let us give life. If we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. We are one with Christ and one with each other."

May the next two years help us to extend this unity to everyone, as we ask over, and over and over again: "Where are the others?"

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Most Rev. John C, Wester,  
Archbishop of Santa Fe