



Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time A September 27, 2020

- ◆ **World Day of Migrants and Refugees**
- ◆ **Blessed Among Us - A Wonderful Daily Devotional**

The last Sunday of September is **World Day of Migrants and Refugees**. In our global family, countless brothers and sisters—as many as 70 million—are refugees (those forced to flee their own country due to violence, persecution, hunger); the displaced (those forced to flee to other parts of their own country); and migrants (those fleeing poverty, cartels, e.g., people in Central and South America). Each year, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, issues a message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees. In this year's message, titled *Like Jesus Christ, Forced to Flee*, Pope Francis writes:

I would like to start with the image that inspired Pope Pius XII in his Apostolic Constitution Exsul Familia (1 August 1952). During the flight into Egypt, the child Jesus experienced with his parents the tragic fate of the displaced and refugees, “which is marked by fear, uncertainty and unease (cf. Mt 2:13-15, 19-23). Unfortunately, in our own times, millions of families can identify with this sad reality. Almost every day the television and papers carry news of refugees fleeing from hunger, war and other great dangers, in search of security and a dignified life for themselves and for their families” (Angelus, 29 December 2013). In each of these people, forced to flee to safety, Jesus is present as he was at the time of Herod. In the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, strangers and prisoners, we are called to see the face of Christ who pleads with us to help (cf. Mt 25:31-49). If we can recognize him in those faces, we will be the ones to thank him for having been able to meet, love and serve him in them.

Displaced people offer us this opportunity to meet the Lord, “even though our eyes find it hard to recognize him: his clothing in tatters, his feet dirty, his face disfigured, his body wounded, his tongue unable to speak our language.” (Homily, 15 February 2019)

© Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE 106th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES 2020, *Like Jesus Christ, forced to flee. Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating internally displaced persons*, 27 September 2020.

What must it be like to flee one's country and home?

Some people in our parish could help us with that question. I am thinking of parishioners who had to leave Cuba when Castro took over, and those who had to flee Vietnam when the North Vietnamese overtook South Vietnam.

In preparing for this column, I spoke with my niece Sinead who in 2016 spent a month at a refugee camp in Greece and 10 days at two camps in France. The camp in Greece was very well organized by the United Nations and the Greek military. Each family had its own camp and ate three meals a day. Most of the refugees were well educated people: teachers, lawyers, etc. Within six months, they were able to relocate to a European country.

Sinead said listening to their stories was heart-wrenching. They told of the suffering that forced them to flee and the long, arduous, dangerous journey from their homeland (mainly Syria and the Sudan) to Greece.

The two camps in France were very badly set up. The living conditions were pretty bad. Most nights, the men would leave to see if they could get on a truck or train to Brittany.

BBC News America. Recently, friends told me about BBC News America (channel 5 on Spectrum). Watching this news station enables me to see a lot that is going on in the world that we never see, or hardly ever see, on CNN, Fox, and other stations. Recently, BBC did a whole coverage on the plight of refugees in the camps in Greece and how the camps were burned down.

In addition to the large numbers of refugees from countries like Syria and the Sudan, there are thousands of migrants in Central and South America, mainly Venezuela, who are fleeing poverty and violence.

No easy solution to a great humanitarian problem

The number of refugees, migrants, displaced, and stateless persons in our global family is enormous and tragic.

The United Nations seeks to help resolve this huge humanitarian problem. One can google UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) for more information.

Catholic Relief Service (CRS) is the international arm of our Church in America that does terrific work in many parts of the world.

Jesuit Relief Services also does wonderful work around the world with refugees. You can learn more about refugees and their stories from those who serve them around the world by visiting <https://www.jrsusa.org/stories> or signing up for their newsletter at <https://www.jrsusa.org/signup/>.

What if every church family in America welcomed one refugee family

As I stated above, the refugee and migrant issue is huge with no easy solution. But as we have often heard: *“It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.”* One simple way to Light a Candle in the midst of this refugee/migrant problem is for parishes of every religion in America to welcome one family. Larger church families could welcome more than one. In the 1980s, I spent a few years at St. Joseph’s in Winter Haven where Fr. Vincent Smith (Fr. Frank’s brother) was pastor. His parish welcomed one Vietnamese family (or perhaps more than one). How wonderful it would be if a way could be found to allow church families all across America to adopt one family and give them a chance of attaining the American dream.

What can we do?

The first thing is to allow this great humanitarian issue to enter our radar, to allow ourselves permission to reflect on this issue and to *see* refugees, migrants and the displaced *as* our brothers and sisters, and definitely *not* as some kind of threat to us. Just reading this column is a first step to allowing this problem to enter our lives. We would do well to google the websites mentioned above. Prayer is always a great thing to do.

The following is a simple enough prayer.

Dear St. Joseph,

You protected Jesus during your flight into Egypt; we now lift up to you all refugees, migrants and displaced persons. Keep them safe and give them strength as they flee violence, persecution and poverty.

We especially ask your protection for children and the elderly.

We ask your blessing on all the organizations and individuals who are seeking to help these brothers and sisters.

Open the eyes of developed nations to find a way to resettle all those who can no longer return safely and securely to their home country.

St. Joseph, help us to see the face of Jesus in these brothers and sisters. Amen.

Further, some of us may be led to donate to organizations or ministries like *Catholic Relief Services* or *Jesuit Relief Services*.

Blessed Among Us, a wonderful daily devotional

Blessed Among Us—Day by Day with Sainly Witnesses by Robert Ellsberg has become one of my favorite spiritual books.

Since the early centuries, Christians have held up the saints as models of living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While the Church officially recognizes a relatively small number of saints, the actual roster is infinitely wider. *Blessed Among Us* explores this eclectic “Cloud of Witnesses”: lay and religious, single and married, canonized and not, and even non-Christians whose faith and wisdom may illuminate our path. Brought to life in the evocative storytelling of Robert Ellsberg, they inspire the moral imagination and give witness to the myriad ways of holiness.

With two stories per day for a full calendar year, Ellsberg sketches figures from biblical times to the present age and from all corners of this world—ordinary figures whose extraordinary lives point to the new age in the world to come.

Praise for the book

Sr. Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking* which became a wonderful movie about her relationship with a prisoner on death row, says:

Robert Ellsberg is way up there in my pantheon of spiritual writers. He’s especially good at connecting us with the divine spark in practitioners of every spiritual tradition. These very human stories of the holy ones among us have a special knack of enlivening my spirit.

Jesuit Priest James Martin writes:

Every single day I read Robert Ellsberg's concise, fascinating, and inspiring lives of the saints.... And every single day I am amazed by the astounding lives that have been lived out of love for Christ.

Finally, Fr. Ronald Rollheiser, author of *The Holy Longing* and *Sacred Fire*, writes:

Saints are the living Word of God, the Word made flesh, but their biographies are often too encrusted within sentimentality and piety to serve as an inspiration for us. Ellsberg gives us their essence in this treasure of a book. Nobody writes better about the lives of the saints than Robert Ellsberg!

I use to read Ellsberg's book now and again. But now I cannot wait to read his offerings for every day. I especially look forward to reading about the many people I have never heard of and who were wonderful people in their time.

Two sample stories

St. Vincent de Paul

Founder, Vincentians (1580-1660)

Vincent de Paul was born to a peasant family in Gascony. Though he later achieved fame for his dedication to the poor, his early life was spent in a determined struggle to escape his humble roots. For this goal, he chose a career in the priesthood. After ordination, his charm and social skills gained him entry into the highest levels of society. A turning point came in midlife, when he was summoned to hear the dying confession of a peasant. He was struck as never before by the seriousness of his vocation and determined afterward that his priesthood would be dedicated to service of the poor.

Eventually he established a mission congregation—later known as the Vincentians—and, with St. Louise de Marillac, founded the Daughters of Charity to serve the poor and sick. There were few charitable projects in which Vincent was not engaged. He founded hospitals and orphanages as well as homes for the humane care of the mentally infirm. He ministered to prisoners and galley slaves and became, already in his lifetime, something of a legend. The rich and powerful vied to endow his projects, while the poor accepted him as one of their own. His spirituality was based on the encounter with Christ in the needs of one's neighbors. As he instructed his priests and sisters, "The poor are your masters and you are their servants."

He died on September 27, 1660, at the age of eighty. He was later named patron of all charitable societies.

"I am for God and the poor." (St. Vincent de Paul)

Robert Ellsberg, *Blessed Among Us: Day By Day with Sainly Witnesses*, a *Give Us This Day* book (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), St. Vincent de Paul, page 557. Used with permission.

Daria Donnelly

Laywoman (1959-2004)

The calendar of saints offers scant attention to those who lived out their faith in the context of ordinary family life. Daria Donnelly, a young laywoman from Cambridge, a wife and mother of two children whose life was cut short by multiple myeloma, represents a kind of faithful witness—lived out, as she put it, amid "the noise, the joy, the distraction" of family life—that leaves no great monument in the world. And yet who can say that she did not exemplify as much as any "great saint" the real vocation of the Christian: to embrace God's love and reflect it back to the world.

Daria grew up in Pittsburgh in a large, loving, and devoutly Catholic family. Later, while working as an editor of *Commonweal* magazine, she engaged in many quiet ministries. When she was struck with a terminal illness, she accommodated herself to her circumstances with a calm, unselfish, and benevolent balance that was the mark of her personality. As her pastor noted, "she was to her core a woman of symbol, of story, of sacrament." She was determined to make each day a witness to life and to make this her legacy to those she loved. As she wrote from her deathbed—"The only thing that matters is showing love and compassion in the time that is given us." She died on September 21, 2004.

"My getting sick increased my attention to the everyday heroism of refugees, the depressed, the arthritic, the mourning, the lonely, all those who know how good it is simply to get through a day." (Daria Donnelly)

Robert Ellsberg, *Blessed Among Us: Day By Day with Sainly Witnesses*, a *Give Us This Day* book (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), Daria Donnelly, page 547. Used with permission.

If you are unable to order the book online, contact Teresa at the Parish Office and she will order it for you.

Have a blessed week,

