

September 23, 2018

From Fr. Jim . . .

“As a nation, we are in a critical moment of defining who we want to be moving forward and the Catholic community has an important responsibility in helping to speak out for justice.” This is the message that I brought home with me when I visited the border in El Paso, Texas and I celebrated an interfaith prayer service with some immigrants, priests and religious leaders of all faiths and denominations with the Catholic Bishop of El Paso.



I was invited to come and meet Jesus at the border and there is no doubt in my mind and heart that Jesus is who I met. I met the Lord in stories of more than 500 immigrant children who were ripped from their parents' arms and are still separated, including 23 under the age of five. I hear the Lord in the tears of the parents of a toddler who died after being released from a government detention facility in Texas. I see the Lord in the stories I heard about psychologically wounded children being returned to their families, frightened to be hugged and lovingly united with their parents. This is the same Lord that I meet each time I hear about ICE performing raids on communities and workplaces throughout our country including Covington, Kentucky.

Parents are suddenly not returning home from work. This cloud of fear and darkness hangs low over immigrant families in Cincinnati and throughout Ohio as real possibilities to be the next targets. With the zero-tolerance policy in effect, immigrants are being dehumanized, criminalized, and demonized. But in it all, the Lord remains ever so present asking us, “As a nation, is this who we want to be?” Softly I hear, and I am reminded that “whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to Him.”

Also, I met the Lord, at the border, in the universal church that is impelled and empowered to speak out against the injustices to and the inhumane treatment of immigrant families. The church's voice is the Lord's voice for the voice of the immigrant who has been silenced and denied. The immigrant has no voice if it is not for the universal church, all faith-based communities and faith-filled people speaking out for them, caring for them, and treating them with the human dignity and respect that they deserve.

There are places such as Annunciation House and La Casa del Inmigrante who receive immigrants who have been released from detention camps to be joined with their families or who have been deported to Mexico. When deported to Mexico, caregivers help them find jobs and give them a safe place to stay. At Annunciation House, caregivers provide legal resources and medical help and try to create a more human environment and healthy family atmosphere until they are deported as a family. Here, I met the Lord loving beyond conditions with compassion, and solidarity, and trying to forgive, heal, redeem and renew. Here, I heard the Lord ask again, “As a nation, is this who we want to be?” and I heard, as church this is who we must be.” Again, I am reminded that “whatever we do to the least of my brothers and sisters, we do to Him.”

When I visited families of parishioner families in Guatemala this past June, the parents and grandparents of our parishioners implored us to keep working for comprehensive immigration reform and they wanted all of us to know that their children are not criminals. I heard this at the same time the first group of detainee children were torn from their families at the border. I had no response but to promise them that we will keep trying to care for their children as if they were our own and in the way that they would love them. I've been to the border and I believe that as a nation we are in a defining moment of who we want to be and the Catholic community with the universal church, has an important responsibility in helping to speak out for justice, to declare that families belong together, that immigration detention is not a solution to family separation, and to continue to care for the immigrant in the way of Christ.