

Since October 1, more than 45,000 unaccompanied children from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador have made a perilous journey across México and crossed the border into the United States. In their home countries, street gangs are terrorizing children. Some kids have been sold as slaves. Many are sexually abused. They are fleeing violence and seeking asylum in the United States. Many of them have relatives here; some do not.

Our country is not equipped to handle these numbers. The Office of Refugee Resettlement has practically exhausted its resources, and it faces unhappy choices of detaining children for long periods of time or sending them back to who knows where? The same department helps adult refugees and asylum-seekers. If it redirects money to the present crisis at the border, it may not sustain other programs. For example, here at St. Anthony's, the Don Bosco Center offers classes in literacy, English and citizenship for those who are trying to make a new home for themselves in the United States. Some Catholic parishes at the border have volunteers ministering to refugee children. They offer companionship, food and games while the kids await an uncertain future.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is using its Justice for Immigrants web site to call attention to the situation. If you go to our parish web site, [309benton.com](http://309benton.com), you will see a link to Justice for Immigrants. Our bishops encourage us to contact our representatives and senators to oppose any legislation that removes protection from children. We can request supplemental support to the Office of Refugee Resettlement. We can also promote actions that may end violence in Central America.

Our country should have the resources to help vulnerable children who are subject to abuse and human trafficking, and who are seeking refuge. We all make difficult decisions about what to do with our money. Some people buy luxury items that then make it hard to pay for food and medicine. Others do not spend very much, but they still cannot pay for even the basic necessities. When we make those difficult decisions, they make us focus on what is most important.

Jesus tells two memorable parables at the start of today's gospel, one about a treasure, and the other about a pearl. In the first case, a person stumbles unexpectedly upon a great treasure. In the second case, a person has been searching a long time and finally finds the pearl of great price. In both instances, the person reallocates resources in order to purchase what is most important. Jesus expected his followers to recognize in him the treasure and the pearl. They should be willing to give up everything in order to follow him.

When children are in trouble, we should be ready to help. As a nation and as families, whenever we see children in need, we should be ready to make some sacrifices on their behalf. They are our treasure, our pearl of great price.