

Second Sunday of Lent

Mexico rejoiced to receive Pope Francis last week, and many of our members including Deacon Tom went to El Paso and Juarez for the celebration this past Wednesday. The Pope issued challenges everywhere he went, to politicians, drug dealers, even his own clergy. In Juarez he addressed many of the problems that have driven the immigration issue into international dialogue. Many Americans worry about the influx of immigrants and what that means to our culture, our economy, our ability to communicate, and our national security. Many Mexicans endure serious problems at home that cause immigration. Violence flourishes among drug dealers. Some employees work long hours and get paid less than \$5 a day - not \$5 an hour, \$5 a day. The desperate search for human dignity convinces many people to migrate, but along the road some of them are robbed, others are enslaved, and still others lose their lives. Pope Francis described their plight: “each step, a journey laden with grave injustices: the enslaved, the imprisoned and extorted.” He also said that “Injustice is radicalized in the youth; they are ‘cannon fodder’ (frontline casualties), persecuted and threatened when they try to flee the spiral of violence and the hell of drugs.”

The pope urged people to fight the devil, and to make dramatic choices for a better life. This requires renouncing Satan, his works and empty promises, and living out our belief in God, especially the teachings of Jesus.

St. Paul loved the Philippians, but he was aware that some people conducted themselves improperly. He wrote pointedly, they are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” For Paul, the cross signified victory over death, the triumph of sacrifice over self-indulgence. But for these enemies, he says, their purpose is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in shame. Then Paul uses an interesting metaphor when you think about immigration: “our citizenship is in heaven,” where God “will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body.” This is why we hear this passage today. Paul’s image of the glorified body of Christ prepares us to hear the gospel of the Transfiguration.

As we reflect on Pope Francis’s visit, we should listen hard to his words and to those of St. Paul. Have we become enemies of the cross of Christ? Do we avoid suffering for the sake of others, and delight in earthly comforts more than heavenly rewards? Are you cheating anyone out of their wages or any property that is rightfully theirs? If so, you are contributing to a cycle of greed and injustice. Do you view pornography? If so, you are contributing to the loss of human dignity. Are you involved in any way with illicit drugs? If so, you are contributing to violence in Mexico, the exploitation of the poor, and illegal immigration.

According to last month’s Pew Research Center study, the flow of Mexicans emigrating to the United States has slowed to such a point that now more Mexicans cross from the United States into Mexico than from Mexico into the US. Do you know the facts about immigration? If not, you are being swayed by opinions and fears, and people are suffering from misinformation.

This Lent, let us become friends of the cross of Christ, missionaries of mercy, correcting our behavior, and helping others achieve human dignity.