



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHINGS

Do We See Christ in the Stranger—the Immigrant?

As noted in our Catholic Social Teachings on migration, one need not look any further than the very life and words of Jesus Christ to begin to understand that persons are on the move and that refugees, migrants, immigrants are special in the eyes of God. As we welcome the stranger(s) into our midst, we welcome Christ Himself, for in that face of the migrant, immigrant, and refugee, we must also recognize the face of Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, this is made clear in the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-15), as they become witnesses to the Truth in by welcoming the stranger, who is Christ.

Catholics around the world have a myriad of papal teachings and magisterial documents, which seek to enlighten and inflame our minds and hearts with the love of Christ to the stranger in our midst each day. From the first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (written by Pope Leo XIII) to the address to the New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants in 1985 (by Pope John Paul II), we have been consistently informed and encouraged to respect the rights of every human being to a freedom of movement and to migrate to other countries and take up residency there.

Pope Benedict XVI has continued this subject of immigration and called upon Americans “to continue to welcome the immigrants who join [our] ranks today ... and to help them flourish in their new home.”

Likewise, the U.S. Bishops have taken the Gospel teachings and the teachings of the Popes and applied it to the present-day immigration reality in the United States. In January 2003, the U.S. bishops issued the pastoral letter, “*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*”. In this document, the U.S. bishops well articulated several principles, including: Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families; Sovereign nations have a right to control their borders; and the Human rights and the human dignity of undocumented migrants should be respected.

By an Act of Congress on January 18, 1837, the motto “In God We Trust” was adopted and later began to appear on U.S. currency circa April 1864. This motto has endured the test of time.

So ... do we, as Americans believe and live a life following the national motto: “In God We Trust.” The forefathers and contributing authors of the U.S. Constitution—especially the Bill of Rights—certainly did.

Do not let the fact that the terms "*illegal aliens*" or "*illegal immigrants*" do not appear in the U.S. Constitution lead us to believe that its rights and freedoms do not apply to them as well. The courts have held otherwise. Often described as a "*living document*," the U.S. Constitution has repeatedly been interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court, federal appeal courts, and Congress in order to address the ever-changing needs and demands of the people. While many argue that "We the People of the United States," refers only to legal citizens; the U.S. Supreme Court has consistently disagreed: Yick Wo v. Hopkins (1886); Wong Wing v. U.S. (1896); Plyler v. Doe (1982), et al.

It's All About the Right to Equal Human Protection, Dignity, and Respect. In essence, the "*equal protection*" clause extends First Amendment protection to anyone and everyone covered by the 5th and 14th Amendments. Through its consistent rulings, the Supreme Court has held that the benefits of the 1st, 5th and 14th Amendments apply equally to illegal immigrants within the U.S. and have rejected the argument that the "*equal*" protections of the 14th Amendment are limited to U.S. citizens only.

While illegal immigrants do not enjoy all of the rights granted to U.S. citizens by the U.S. Constitution—specifically the rights to vote, hold elected political office, etc.—these rights can also be denied to U.S. citizens convicted of felonies.

In final analysis, the courts have ruled that, while they are within the borders of the United States, illegal immigrants are granted the same human, fundamental, and undeniable constitutional rights granted to all Americans.

Likewise, the U.S. bishops have noted in their pastoral letter, "*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*": "When persons are unable to find work and support themselves and their families, they have a right to migrate to other countries and work. This right is not absolute, as stated by Pope John XXIII, when he said this right to emigrate applies when 'there are just reasons for it.' In the current condition of the world, in which global poverty is rampant and political unrest has resulted in wars and persecution, migrants who are forced to leave their homes out of necessity and seek only to survive and support their families must be given special consideration." "The Church recognizes the right of [sovereign nations] to protect and control its borders in the service of the common good of its citizens. However, this is not an absolute right. Nations also have an obligation to the universal common good ... and should seek to accommodate migration [legal avenues for persons to enter the national legally in a safe, orderly, and dignified manner] to the greatest extent possible."

In closing, the U.S. bishops remind each of us: "Persons who enter a nation without proper authorization or who over-stay their visas should be treated with respect and dignity. They should be afforded due process of the law ... and they should not be blamed for the social ills of a nation."

(SR: Justice for Immigrants: We are One Family Under God; Catholic Social Teaching and Migration; Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace) @2007); Justia.com (U.S. Supreme Court Center); et al)