

Nativity of John the Baptist Summer Ordinary time – June 24, 2018-B

Isaiah 49:12-6; Psalm 139:1b-3,13-14ab,14c-15; Acts 13:22-26; Luke 1:57-66,80

Homily, Father Ed Hislop

Each time we gather here, just before processing together to the Lord's Table for Holy Communion we hear these words: *"At the savior's command, we dare to say..."* Then with the whole church in every part of the world we say words which have perhaps become too familiar and spoken all too often and easily without reflection: "OUR Father..."

"Our Father," words we dare to say, daring words, challenging words, disturbing words especially in days like these. OUR Father by which we proclaim our faith, trust, way of acting and living; two words which change every perception, every attitude and take us beyond any kind of political belief, beyond any border and beyond every judgement. We speak for all the world to hear that we share the same Father, we are all brothers and sisters, all one family: No border, no arbitrary judgement, racial profiling, language or prejudice can change that. Words which are heard on the coastlands, by distant peoples in the womb of every mother and in the mystery of every child.

Words, which today, are said, but deliberately, it would seem, not believed by all.

Today we remember that John the Baptist is born anew into this world, into this land, into all the turmoil, hatred and violence done to children, mothers and fathers even as we gather here.

Who could have lived through these past weeks without a broken heart? How can we not hear John, that strange man in the desert, speaking words which bring discomfort to oppressors and dividers; challenge to the lies told about people, children, families running for their lives, trying to escape violence, persecution, crime and hatred in their homelands, who are, in the midst of their struggle and fear named "criminals" out to destroy the *"land of the free and the home of the brave?"*

Names used to justify injustice, names used to take children from their mothers, and still, today, keeping them apart. John is born anew and speaks, as he did over 2000 years ago: *"Prepare the way of the Lord....clear a straight path..."* *"Repent, reform your lives..."* John himself, as we all remember, because of his words of challenge to the powers of his day, was murdered by the King because he brought the Word of God into the midst of the nation and challenged the ways of the powerful oppressors of his country. Some today object in similar ways saying that "politics" should be kept away from the Gospel and out of Church. But Christ's Gospel, which we are mandated to proclaim and live, is always directed toward the world—spoken to the city in the midst of the human community. It is not full of "pious" stories only meant to comfort, it is rather a way to change the world especially for those who suffer.

So John the Baptist is born again today in words spoken from the heart of our Catholic Church, words which are discomfiting to some, challenging and angering to others and heartening to many more.

Pope Francis and the Bishops of the United States are clear as they speak: The policy of separating migrant families at the Mexican border is immoral and contrary to our Catholic values, and betrays the "right to life." *(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)* It is un-American, un-Christian and inhumane; it is mean-spirited and betrays our nation's tradition of welcome to migrants and refugees.

Pastoral letter of Patrick J. McGrath, Bishop of San Jose

"While protecting our borders is important we can and must do better as a government, and as a society, to find ways to ensure the safety of families. Separating babies from their mothers is not the answer and is immoral." *(Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)*

It is wrong, as has been done by some government officials, to dare to use the word of God to justify actions that are, at their heart sinful, all while choosing to ignore what is basic and fundamental to both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures:

The Book of Exodus reminds us that we “shall not oppress the resident alien among us, for we know the heart of the alien for we ourselves were once aliens...”

The Book of Deuteronomy proclaims that “God loves the stranger” and calls us to “do all that the stranger needs us to do...”

We discover in the Gospel that Mary, Joseph and Jesus were once migrant refugees fleeing into the land of Egypt to escape persecution and the separation of their child from them because their infant son was thought to be a danger to the nation.

Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan and his compassion to the stranger ignored by “proper citizens,” reminding us that the way we treat foreigners is the way we will be treated...”

And then there is the great judgment of the nations....*not individuals but nations*, when Jesus

says that at the last judgement God will gather the *nations* before him: “*Whatever you did to the least of these sisters and brothers of mine, you did to me.*”

“Our Father:” These are all our sisters and brothers: foreigner, refugee, stranger, alien of every kind and color....human persons with a human heart. Persons who laugh and cry, mothers, fathers, and children who love and forget, who are graceful and sinful (just like us). Human beings not faceless creatures who are called an “*infestation*” on our land, but families running for their lives crying “will you let us in...”

We must “dare” to gaze into their longing eyes and see the hopeful face of Christ, and with John the Baptist “*Repent and Prepare the way of the Lord,*” and do the work of building a bridge, and opening a door with new hearts that “break open” when these sisters, brothers and children turn to us crying, “Will you let us in...” And maybe, one day soon, they will say to us, as Jesus said: Go and report to the others what you hear and see: The blind see, cripples walk, the deaf hear and the poor have finally heard good news.

“*What you have done for the least of these, you have done for me.*”

And so we *dare* to say: “Our Father....”



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Sources: National Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope.
National Migration Week 2018 Resources.
Catholic Social Teaching on Migration: blessedtrinitymissoula.org
Many Journey's; One Family (USCCB): blessedtrinitymissoula.org
Justice For Immigrants: justiceforimmigrants.org
Statement from Daniel Cardinal DiNardo,
President United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Pastoral Letter of Patrick J. McGrath, Bishop of San Jose