Charitably Speaking

by Patrick Winn
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Catholic Charities

Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.

— W. Earl Brooks

Catholic Charities refines and expands our employment placement programs we build on our work placing refugees in productive employment.

Our success rate is always about 90% placement, usually above 93%, within 120 days of arrival.

2 Immigrants are not employable.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, labor force participation during the recent record setting economic expansion:

a. White high school graduates: 50% for foreign born; 53% for native born.

b. Black high school graduates: 70.4% for foreign born; 58% for native born.

c. Hispanic high school graduates: 72.2% for foreign born; 67.6% for native born.

d. White bachelor’s degree: 69.5% for foreign born; 72.7% for native born.

e. Black bachelor’s degree: 4.8% for foreign born; 76.7% for native born.

f. Hispanic bachelor’s degree: 74.4% for foreign born; 87.7% for native born.

3 Immigrants are more likely to use public benefits than native-born Americans.

Immigrants are no more likely than native-born Americans to use public benefits and most can’t access them for the first five years of residency. During that period, they are likely to become employed.

So if we’re truly seeking a solution to the multi-faceted immigration crisis let’s make sure that we operate only from facts. Prayers will then only seem to go unanswered.

The answer may be “not yet” when an approach not based on American principles is championed or “no” when a proposal does not honor human dignity and respect for new arrivals.

Some of the issues:

1 Refugees flood the jobs market.

Whatever the economic trends, refugees do not flood the job market. Rather, they come fully vetted with valued skills and needed technical abilities. As usual above 93%, within 120 days of arrival.

The story is told of a gentleman who was running late for an important meeting.

After circling the block of the building where the meeting was to be convened in 10 minutes, he finally turned to prayer saying, “Oh, God, please let me find a parking space and I will give up drinking, go to church and give to charity.”

No sooner did he say his “amen” to that career-saving prayer, than a space opened and he quickly backed into it. With heartfelt emotion he quickly ran from his car saying, “Never mind. I found one.”

Politicians seek a solution to the current immigration crisis and decide to campaign car saying, “Never mind. I found one.”

I will give up drinking, go to church and give to charity.

God, please let me find a parking space and I will give up drinking, go to church and give to charity.

Our own axes grind out an agenda that keeps us from seeing, as John Adams observed, how inconvenient facts can be. There is a saying that is championed or “no” when a proposal does not honor human dignity and respect for new arrivals.

Yet, there is no irony without consequences. Many voices that are loud and prejudiced are being drowned in the silence of voices that are more moderate and better informed about our Catholic tradition regarding immigrants and refugees. Silence has consequences.

Remaining silent before the excesses of people who demonize immigrants and twist their experiences for political or social gain has consequences. Remaining silent by failing to affirm the human dignity of every immigrant and refugee has consequences.

This is not the first time in the history of our nation that conversations about immigration and refugees create animosity. Some episodes in the past have ended in exclusion and violence against immigrant groups. Have we learned something from our own history?

If not, it is imperative that every catechetical program for Catholic children and adults today puts serious time into studying the consequences of biased rhetoric against immigrants. European Catholics who arrived in the U.S. in a century ago experienced such biases. Let us not ignore the brutal mistreatment of immigrants from Africa brought to our shores under the most dehumanizing conditions. Decades of discrimination against immigrants from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean should set us pause.

We must take time to learn about the consequences of remaining silent before the mistreatment and exploitation of immigrants in other societies. There are important lessons to learn from the tragic end of refugees who were denied asylum by nations that could have welcomed them. Ignorance feeds silence. Even when someone speaks, doing so with prejudice would silence the truth. Ignorance and silence together make us complicit in sin.

I have been paying close attention to recent debates in the U.S. about immigration and refugees. Doing this is sometimes painful. More painful is to learn that quite a good number of the voices that are loud and prejudiced about immigrants and refugees are Catholic.

The pain becomes more acute when Catholics, especially many holding positions of leadership in Church and society, choose to remain silent before the excesses of the loud and prejudiced voices — Catholic and non-Catholic — or fall short from being prophetic.

Did we all read the same Bible? Did we all study the same Catechism of the Catholic Church? Did we ever pay any attention to the social teachings of the Church about immigration and refugees? Did we ever hear that rejecting the other is wrong with prejudice would silence the truth. Ignorance and silence together make us complicit in sin. No sooner did he say his “amen” to that career-saving prayer, than a space opened and he quickly backed into it. With heartfelt emotion he quickly ran from his car saying, “Never mind. I found one.”

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Catholic Talk of Immigrants, Refugees

To speak of immigration and refugees in the United States of America at this historical juncture is risky business. I for one never knows where one’s conversation partner stands on this question. One does not know whether one will be welcomed into that conversation again.

While many Catholics seem reluctant to speak about immigration to avoid conflict, ironically we hear about the topic everywhere on social networks and in the mass media.

Journeying Together

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4 Catholic News Service

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