



Suggestions for Homilists

Homily ideas regarding the bishops' pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: A Journey of Hope*

Immigrants who come to the United States, particularly the undocumented, are among the voiceless who need someone to speak on behalf of their human rights and dignity. When the scriptural or liturgical texts address this point, whether on a special occasions or on regular Sundays, the homily can be an effective moment for prophetic instruction and encouragement. The homily provides an opportune moment to highlight the Church's mandate and tradition of welcome, outreach and service, and to invite others to participate in this calling.

HIGHLIGHT SCRIPTURE, CHURCH TRADITION, AND THE TEACHING OF THE BISHOPS.

Catholic concern for migrants and refugees has a strong foundation in Scripture. The Old and New Testaments poignantly depict Moses and the Jewish people in exile and the Holy Family as refugees. The obstacles to a hearty welcome (fear of the stranger, prejudice, competition, sense of loss) also find counterparts in the parables of Jesus and in His capacity to break through the taboos and restrictions of his contemporaries, especially in regard to tax collectors, sinners, Samaritans, and Gentiles. (See attached for a list of relevant scriptural passages.) These scriptural teachings call us to a deeper compassion for the plight of the migrant. Inspired by this calling of our faith, the Church has developed a rich body of teaching and a heritage of concern for immigrants, migrants, and refugees.

The faithful in the United States—a land so blessed and whose tradition is steeped in the immigrant experience—have special responsibility to be a welcoming people. In the pastoral letter, *Strangers no Longer: A Journey of Hope*, the bishops remind us that as Catholics, we have an obligation to uphold this tradition of our faith.

HIGHLIGHT CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND CHALLENGE PEOPLE'S PRESUMPTIONS.

Highlight interesting facts and statistics in your homily to challenge prejudices and inform people about important demographic changes taking place in our country, including the growing anti-immigrant sentiment and media misinformation. Teach people about what the Church's rich body of social thought says about our Christian responsibility to "welcome the stranger among us."

HOMILIES FOR LITURGICAL FEASTS AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS

You can use the opportunity of a liturgical feast day to promote the themes of *Justice for Immigrants*. Here are some examples:

- ✦ On certain feast days, it may be appropriate to raise questions about laws that deny immigrants the human rights of housing, education, and health care.
- ✦ On Right to Life Sunday, one could raise awareness of the hundreds that die crossing the desert in an attempt to come to the United States for a better life and how immigration policies currently do not reflect our respect for life.
- ✦ On a day such as Thanksgiving, you can lift up farm workers to thank God for their efforts and to inform the congregation about the dehumanizing conditions in which they often find themselves.
- ✦ On feast days such as Epiphany, Pentecost, or the parish saint's feast day, the gifts of newcomers, the unity of the diverse parish family, and the parish as a welcoming community can be highlighted.

Homilists



JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS *a journey of hope*

Feasts that are days of devotion to particular ethnic groups in the parish can be made occasions for total parish celebration.

The following homily ideas are intended to inspire the homilist.

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

- † During the Offertory, have parishioners in native dress bring gifts of home-baked bread to offer the Christ child.
- † Invite the parishioners to gather in the parish hall at the end of Mass to share the breads.
- † Begin the homily by describing how the Offertory and the post-Mass gathering reflect the meaning of today's feast of the Epiphany.

Let us rejoice in the fact that all of us, from different parts of the world, share a common faith in Jesus, the Light of the World. This is the meaning of today's feast of the Epiphany, the feast of the manifestation of Jesus as Savior to the World.

The Scriptures do not tell us where the Magi came from. But from early on in Christian art, these Magi were depicted as three men coming from Europe, Asia, and Africa; and through them, Jesus was depicted as the "Light of Nations." Though he was born in one particular place, in one particular culture, Jesus was born to save all people and lead them to the vision of the light.

The Church as a sacrament of communion with God and with all people is what we celebrate on this feast of the Epiphany. Our parish is made up of many peoples of different nations and cultures. Yet what joins us is our common faith in Jesus, the "Light of nations." In Jesus, we, different though we are, find a unity that is as deep as the unity in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we share the Eucharist here in the church, and as we afterwards share the breads from different countries, we are called to build up the spirit of community among ourselves. Often we come to Church and sit in the same pew every Sunday, in front of the same people, but we have not come to know them by name. This Sunday after Mass I encourage you to introduce yourself; each Sunday thereafter, introduce yourself to people whom you see each Sunday at Mass. We share a tremendous faith and are united in a mystery that can be a source of great strength and joy to us. As a community we are meant to be a sign to those around us of the presence of a loving Christ—a community willing to draw disparate groups of our neighborhood together, a community concerned with our weakest and most marginalized.

Besides being called to outreach as a community, we are called as individuals to bring to others the light of Christ. Our faith in Christ is the great gift given to us, a gift that is meant to be shared. Today at this Eucharist we renew our love for Jesus and we resolve to bring that love of Jesus to others. This feast of the Epiphany has a missionary thrust. The feast impels us to invite those who have turned away from Jesus' light or who have not experienced his light in their lives. We invite them to our parish—to a social event with our family or to a liturgy that can engage them in the love of God and the hospitality of our community. This missionary dimension is meant to be part of our lives as followers of Jesus. Jesus has no hands but ours.

The feast of the Epiphany highlights our role in the Church and our missionary task.

PENTECOST

- † Explain how miracles happen when we suspend judgment, draw closer, and listen to each other (e.g., when the bystanders suspended their belief that the Apostles were drunk and moved closer, they actually heard the Apostles proclaim Christ's message in their own languages).
- † Remind the congregation how, when we include others in our circle or enter into theirs, we often, to our astonishment, find similarities.
- † Ask the congregation to consider ways they can promote inclusiveness within the church community and live out Pentecost every day.
- † Encourage the congregation at Mass to say the "Our Father" in their respective first languages.

Pentecost was an important annual feast in the Jewish calendar, celebrated fifty days after Passover, primarily as a harvest festival and also to commemorate the giving of God's Law to Moses. The feast brought together to Jerusalem Jews from within and outside Palestine, and peoples of different languages. At Pentecost, Jerusalem was a multilingual city. The mention in Scripture of the different nations indicates that all peoples under heaven (known at the time) were represented in Jerusalem. It is significant that this festival was chosen by God to manifest the outpouring of the Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Apostles, who were all Galileans, were enabled by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News in different languages. Those who gathered thought the Apostles were drunk (Acts 2:13). But as they drew closer to the Apostles, to their bewilderment each heard the Good News proclaimed in his/her own tongue. Thus from the very beginning, the Church is "catholic," meaning "universal."