



International Old Catholic Churches

Office of the Presiding Bishop

Saturday, November 21, 2015
The Feast of the Presentation of Mary

Bishop's Summary

The violence in our world knows no race, gender, or religion. It is born out of human greed, lust for power and a desire to be the only one in charge.

There are those who are calling for us to refuse entry to the refugees fleeing the violence around them. This runs contrary to our values as Christians. Those who call for such actions are not Christians. They miss the message of the story of Christ's birth, the story of the Sheep and Goats, the story of the Good Samaritan, Christ's call to let the little children come to him, and the command in Leviticus to treat foreigners as natural born citizens. (Matthew 25:32-45, Leviticus 19:33-34, Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 19:14)

Those who continue to decry refugees coming into our country, understand this: You cannot turn away the stranger at the door and call yourself a Christian. They are two opposing sides and you cannot serve two masters. Either be a Christian and welcome these refugees as you would the Christ, or stop pretending to be a Christian.

We, the International Old Catholic Churches, call on all people to open their hearts and homes (countries, states) to those who need our help and protection. We call on everyone to let go of fear and embrace Christ in all people.

Full letter follows on the next page.



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My brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

Violence is running wild in our world today. Many today blame race, religion, gender, sexual identity and/or God's wrath for any of the above as their cause. However, the violence we see in our world today transcends all those factors. This violence has no race, no religion, it is bred in the hearts of men and women without respect for who they are.

Many politicians today are calling for us to refuse entry to refugees fleeing the violence they quickly decry. These politicians want us to be afraid of those different from us, those whose religion is not a certain brand of "Christianity". They wish to distract us from the human component of this constant violence. They distract us from the innocent victims of this violence by claiming that no one is innocent. This is not an us verses them situation. We are all humans and as such we all deserve to live without fear and violence.

At this time of year especially, we recall another family of refugees. Saint Joseph and Saint Mary, the virgin mother of the Christ, wandered throughout Bethlehem looking for a place for the Christ Child to be born. Everywhere they turned they encountered closed doors. We read this story over and over again at this time of year. Yet, despite the obvious parallels between the current refugee crisis and the story of the birth of the Christ Child, many people who call themselves Christians continue to slam the door shut in the face of Christ.

Scripture is clear about this behavior: "And all the nations shall be gathered together before him. And he shall separate them from one another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he shall station the sheep, indeed, on his right, but the goats on his left. Then the King shall say to those who will be on his right: 'Come, you blessed of my Father. Possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; **I was a stranger, and you took me in;** naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.' Then the just will answer him, saying: 'Lord, when have we seen you hungry, and fed you; thirsty, and given you drink? And when have we seen you a stranger, and taken you in? Or naked, and covered you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit to you?' And in response, the King shall say to them, '**Amen I say to you, whenever you did this for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did it for me.**' Then he shall also say, to those who will be on his left: 'Depart from me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I



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was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and you did not give me to drink; **I was a stranger and you did not take me in**; naked, and you did not cover me; sick and in prison, and you did not visit me.’ Then they will also answer him, saying: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he shall respond to them by saying: **‘Amen I say to you, whenever you did not do it to one of these least, neither did you do it to me.’** And these shall go into eternal punishment, but the just shall go into eternal life.’” (Matthew 25:32-45. CPDV)

Jesus is clear that when we take in the stranger, we take him in. However, when we turn away the stranger at our door (state, country) we turn away Jesus. When we turn away refugees fleeing violence and instead send them back to be murdered for their faith or their nationality, we are doing the same to Jesus! We are looking Jesus in the face and demanding that he return to the country he came from. We are looking Jesus in the face and telling him that we do not want his kind here.

Is that really the “Christian” response? Does this show that you are a follower of the Christ? I think not!

Even in the Old Testament, God the Father had this to say: “If a newcomer lives in your land and abides among you, do not reproach him, but let him be among you like one native born. And you shall love him as yourselves. For you were also newcomers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34. CPDV).

Many “Christians” love to recite Leviticus when it comes to issues like homosexuality. However, they seem to forget verses like the one above. If we are to obey Leviticus when it comes to human sexuality, then we must obey all of Leviticus: this includes treating the stranger as a native born.

Interestingly, none of these verses contain a religious litmus test. They all speak of treating people with respect, dignity and giving them refuge regardless of their religion or skin color. In the story of the Good Samaritan, we read: “And behold, a certain expert in the law rose up, testing him and saying, “Teacher, what must I do to possess eternal life?” But he said to him: “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” In response, he said: “You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart, and from your whole soul, and from all your strength, and from all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him: “You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.” But since he wanted to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Then Jesus, taking this up, said: “A certain man descended from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he happened upon robbers, who now also plundered him. And inflicting him with wounds, they went away, leaving him behind, half-alive. And it happened that a certain priest was descending along the same way. And seeing him, he passed by. And similarly a Levite, when he was near the place, also saw him, and he passed by. But a certain Samaritan, being on a journey, came near him. And seeing him, he was moved by mercy. And approaching him, he bound up his wounds, pouring



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oil and wine on them. And setting him on his pack animal, he brought him to an inn, and he took care of him. And the next day, he took out two denarii, and he gave them to the proprietor, and he said: 'Take care of him. And whatever extra you will have spent, I will repay to you at my return.' Which of these three, does it seem to you, was a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?" Then he said, "The one who acted with mercy toward him." And Jesus said to him, "Go, and act similarly." (Luke 10:25-37. CPDV)

All the people who looked like the injured man, who were of the same religion, race, and gender of the man passed him by without a second thought. They had no care or concern for even their own brother! However, the Samaritan man, an outcast to the Jews, stopped, tended to his needs, put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn. He then paid for the innkeeper to take care of this man who was taught that his savior, the Samaritan man, was evil. Who are we in the story? Are we the self-righteous, hypocritical priest and Levite willing to walk on by and ignore the plight of others? Or are we the Samaritan man who was willing to stop and help someone who hated him?

Some people have even called for us to deny entry to children. This is most despicable thing I have ever heard. Jesus even spoke about this as well: "Yet truly, Jesus said to them: "Allow the little children to come to me, and do not choose to prohibit them. For the kingdom of heaven is among such as these." (Matthew 19:14. CPDV) He says the Kingdom of God is made of little children! To turn them away is a grievous wrong.

Those who continue to decry refugees coming into our country, understand this: You cannot turn away the stranger at the door and call yourself a Christian. They are two opposing sides and you cannot serve two masters. Either be a Christian and welcome these refugees as you would the Christ, or stop pretending to be a Christian.

The International Old Catholic Churches call on all people to open your hearts, your home (country, state) to those who need our help and protection. We call you to let go of fear and embrace Christ in all people.

May God bless you all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I remain, In His Service,

 *Gregory W. Godsey*

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