

March for Immigrant Rights
April 10, 2006
Archbishop José H. Gomez

We gather today in a spirit of peace and solidarity asking for God's Wisdom to encourage our elected official to find a reasonable path for the security of our country, protecting our borders and recognizing the dignity of immigrants in our nation.

Sacred Scripture tells us that "If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself...for you were once strangers yourselves..."

Our nation is at an historic moment in its immigration reform debate. We live in challenging times and we cannot let the conversation end here, deadlocked in political rhetoric and unnecessary fear. We come today to let our leaders know, that they cannot simply stop or delay the process. It is my prayer for all those involved, that our legislators will find a solution that will unite us as a just and compassionate people before God.

No political agenda can be more important than the recognition of the dignity of every person. Today, we call for our leaders to come together to shape American public policy on a framework of justice. As I wrote recently in a column in the newspaper, we must let them know that "we can settle for nothing less than an approach to immigration that brings families together, that provides the migrant with the opportunity to find work with dignity, and recognizes the right of a person to flee economic oppression in order to seek a better life and provide for their family."

Let our mission be, to show those who are struggling to earn the very basics of life for themselves and their families the hope and love of God in what we do here today.

The spirit of The Statue of Liberty, our uniquely American sign of welcome, does not live on an island, but in the hearts of generations of immigrants who have come here to make this a greater country. The United States has always been a nation of immigrants. That is our strength. People come north from Mexico and from other Latin American countries to work here and share with the United States a common continent, common faith and moral heritage, and a common desire to build a better future.

We must not endorse a law that makes criminals of the 10 to 12 million undocumented immigrants. We cannot accept a public policy that also makes criminals of those who serve them. Our love and charity must not be dependant on any person's immigration status, for Jesus said, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." The stranger is the most vulnerable among us. No law can keep us from being Jesus' hands reaching out to help and heal.

We would like all immigrants, the ones already living in our country and the ones that would like to come in the future, to have the option to a legal and fair process that responds to the economic needs of our country and not forcing them to risk their lives to be able to find the means to provide for their families. Nothing good comes from illegal immigration. Nobody wants to be undocumented.

We are a nation who says we endorse family values. There is no greater argument for just immigration reform than to unite families. We must have public policy that streamlines the process to bring husbands, wives, and children together without having to be separated for years. We must understand the personal anguish that our current immigration laws impose on families. We must encourage our leaders to create a reasonable path to legalization for those honest people who contribute to the well-being of our nation with their hard work everyday.

While we certainly recognize and affirm the right and obligation of our nation to regulate its borders, we also challenge our legislators to construct a just immigration policy that reflects the value and dignity of every human life.

Holy week has begun. Yesterday, Palm Sunday, we were reminded of Jesus journey through the streets of Jerusalem. The people waived their palms, and lifted their voices. "Hosannah" they cried, "Save us now".

As we walk through the streets of San Antonio, a city which has richly benefited from the many immigrants who have contributed to a rich and varied culture, let our prayer be, "Hosanna, save us now from the cold of indifference and the pain of injustice"

“When did we see you a Stranger and Welcome you....Whenever you did this to the least of my brothers, you did it to me.” It is at this historic moment, when our nation’s conscience intersects with our public policy, we must recognize Jesus in the Stranger among us.

We must open up our hearts to God’s grace, and let this nation give life and meaning to the invitation on the Statue of Liberty, “Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door”.

The challenge then is clear and urgent. Let’s hope that we have the wisdom and strength to hear the call from God to live as brothers and sisters and to build a better world.

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