



HOMILY

Mass for the 111th World Day of Migrants and Refugees

Given by Robert Cardinal McElroy, Archbishop of Washington

Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, Washington, DC

September 28, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.

For the past one hundred ten years, Mass has been celebrated throughout our country to honor and support immigrants and refugees who have come to our nation as part of that stream of men and women from every land who have built up the United States into a great nation. But this year is different from the one hundred ten years that have preceded it. For this year we are confronting – both as a nation and as a Church – an unprecedented assault upon millions of immigrant men and women and families in our midst.

Our first obligation as a Church is to embrace in a sustained, unwavering, prophetic and compassionate way the immigrants who are suffering so deeply because of the oppression they are facing. Our Catholic community here in Washington has witnessed many people of deep faith, integrity and compassion who have been swept up and deported in the crackdown which has been unleashed in our nation. A profound ministry of consolation, justice and support must be the hallmark of our spiritual and pastoral care at this moment, and I thank all of the parishes, priests and faith leaders in our community who have taken up this ministry, so many of whom are present today.

For the undocumented community of our Archdiocese, your daily witness of faith and family, hard work and sacrifice, compassion and love is a profound reflection of the deepest virtues of our faith and the most noble aspirations of our nation. The theme of today's procession is hope amidst adversity, and in these days of deep suffering you give us an example of transforming hope and a resiliency that is founded upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whose cross symbolizes at its core suffering amidst injustice, and the recognition that in our moments of deepest hardship, our God stands with us.

We are witnessing a comprehensive governmental assault designed to produce fear and terror among millions of men and women who have through their presence in our nation been nurturing precisely the religious, cultural, communitarian and familial bonds that are most frayed and most valuable at this moment in our country's history. This assault seeks to make life unbearable for undocumented immigrants. It is willing to tear families apart, separating grieving mothers from their children, and fathers from the sons and daughters who are the center of their lives. It embraces as collateral damage the horrific emotional suffering that is being thrust on children who were born here, but now face the terrible choice of losing their parents or leaving the only country that they have ever known.

Catholic social teaching states that every nation has the right to effectively control its own borders and provide security. Thus, efforts to secure our borders and deport those undocumented immigrants convicted of serious crimes constitute legitimate national goals. At times, our government asserts that these goals constitute the essence and scope of its immigration enforcement efforts, and if that were true Catholic teaching would raise no objection.

But the reality we are facing here in the Archdiocese of Washington and across our country is far different. For our government is engaged in -- by its own admission and by the tumultuous enforcement actions it has launched -- a comprehensive campaign to uproot millions of families and hard-working men and women who have come to our country seeking a better life that includes contributing to building up the best elements of our culture and society. This campaign relies on fear and terror at its core, for the government knows that it cannot succeed in its efforts except by bringing new dimensions of fear and terror to our nation's history and life. Its goal is simple and unitary: to rob undocumented immigrants of any real peace in their lives so that in misery they will "self-deport".

What is the moral foundation for the government in undertaking such a comprehensive campaign of fear, in uprooting ten million people from their homes and expelling them from our country? The government says the answer is simple and determinative: they broke a law when they entered or chose to stay in the United States.

But today's Gospel proposes a far different measure for determining whether ten million men and women and children and families who have lived alongside us for decades should face terror and expulsion: are they our neighbors?

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is the greatest parable that Jesus gave to the formation of our moral lives and our understanding of bonds of community and sacrifice and embrace in this world. The most striking element of the Parable is not that the Samaritan took notice of the man who had been robbed, or that he was willing to sacrifice on his behalf or that he placed his own life at risk by stopping in a very dangerous location to see if help was needed. No, the most striking element of the Parable is that the Samaritan was willing to reject the norms of society which said that because of his birth and status he had no obligation to the victim, who was a Jew. The piercing insight and glory of the Samaritan was that he rejected the narrowness and myopia of the law to understand that the victim he was passing by was truly his neighbor and that both God and the moral law obligated him to treat him as neighbor.

In the very same way, for us as believers and citizens, our obligation regarding undocumented women and men is to ask ourselves: Are they truly our neighbor? Is the mother who sacrifices in every dimension of her life to nurture children who will live rightly, productively and caringly our neighbor? Is the man being deported despite the fact that he has three sons who serve in the marines because of the values he taught them our neighbor? Is the woman who works to provide home care for our sick and elderly parents our neighbor? Is the young adult who came here as a child and loves this nation as the only country he has ever known our neighbor? Is the undocumented woman who contributes tirelessly to our parish, caring for the church, leading the daily rosary our neighbor?

In the Gospel today Jesus demands that the central perspective we must bring to understanding the moral legitimacy of the campaign of fear and deportation being waged in our country today springs from the bonds of community that have come to tie us together as neighbors, not the question of whether sometime in their past individuals broke a law by entering or remaining in the United States.

It is this perspective that must form our stance and action as people of faith. As a Church we must console and peacefully stand in solidarity with the undocumented men and women whose lives are being upended by the government's campaign of fear and terror. Courage and sacrifice must be the hallmark of our actions at this moment of historic and deliberate suffering being visited upon people living truly good lives that are a credit to our nation. As citizens, we must not be silent as this profound injustice is carried out in our name. The priest and the Levite in today's Gospel are a stark reminder that in the face of suffering, we so often choose to pass on by – sometimes out of indifference, sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of a general reluctance to become involved.

But Jesus rejected this indifference, this fear, this reluctance. His telling last words in the Gospel allow only one option. Which of these in your opinion was neighbor to the robber's victim? In understanding and facing the oppression of undocumented men and women in our midst, we can only have one response: I was, Lord, because I saw in them your face.



The Roman Catholic
Archdiocese of Washington