

Treating Them with Dignity
Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunncliff
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Our United States *Declaration of Independence* is known for the words

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The rights are given to *all*. The *Declaration of Independence* does not limit who has these rights. The rights of *Life, Liberty* and the *pursuit of Happiness* are human rights that belong to everyone. They are not legal rights that are given only to a specific group of people.

Our United States Constitution begins

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The United States declared its independence eleven years before the Constitution was written. The *Articles of Confederation* governed our nation before our present constitution. The *Articles of Confederation* were found to be lacking. So, the Constitution was written to provide a *more perfect union*. It was drafted to *establish Justice* and *insure domestic Tranquility*, and *promote the general welfare* of the people. To have true *justice*, justice must exist for everyone. I am not a lawyer or a historian, but I do not see anything in the Constitution that limits what we read in the first paragraph to a select group of people. It applies to everyone.

In the past I have generally avoided deep discussion on immigration issues. Honestly, I have been divided myself on immigration. Immigration is a very difficult and controversial issue. United States policies on dealing with illegal immigrants has changed drastically under the new administration. I believe the time has come to discuss what our Catholic faith offers on how we treat immigrants. *Everyone* has been given the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I write today with a pastor's heart, mindful that the parishes I serve have Spanish speaking immigrants who feel threatened by the current treatment of illegal immigrants. I believe what I write is based on what the Lord wants. I thank the Lord for his inspiration as I went in the span of thirty minutes from not knowing what I would write about in my next article to having two pages of scratch notes.

Immigration is nothing new. In [Exodus 12:49](#), God instructed how the Israelites of how they should treat immigrants

There will be one law for the native and for the alien residing among you.

Leviticus 19:34 explains why we treat immigrants as equals

*You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; **for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God.***

Immigrants have the same human rights as citizens of a nation. The **fear** presently found among many immigrants in our country strikes against their **hope**. Our Catholic Church is presently in a Jubilee Year of Hope. In his document, "Spes Non Confundit," for this jubilee year, Pope Francis includes migrants among those who need and deserve **hope**. As I wrote in my document We Need Hope Part II,

Pope Francis speaks of migrants ("Spes Non Confundit", 13). There are those who want to send migrants "back to where they came from." These people seem to think that all migrants come to steal and take our jobs. I think what many of them are really looking for is hope. I think we all need to ask ourselves how bad things must be in the migrants' homeland given what they go through to get here.

Several individual bishops and regional conferences of bishops in the United States have recently written statements on immigration regarding the current policies on immigrants. Bishop Matano, the bishop of the Diocese of Rochester where I serve, is one of them. In his letter he states

a very needed reform of immigration laws has yet to be achieved.

He continues

The need for secure borders is legitimate and acknowledged; however, we cannot secure our borders by creating unjust insecurity among refugees and migrants.¹

Archbishop Naumann of the Archdiocese of Kansas City is also among the bishops who have issued statements. He writes

the Church does not have the authority or the responsibility to determine the legal status of those living in the United States" but does have "an obligation to care for every person with respect and love, no matter their citizenship status."²

He also admits that there are some illegal immigrants who are threats to public safety. Individually, these safety issues need to be addressed but this does not justify harsh treatment towards all immigrants, whether they are here legally or not.

¹ Bishop Matano – "Bishop Matano's Letter to the Faithful regarding Immigration January 30, 2025." <https://www.dor.org/bishop-matanos-letter-to-the-faithful-regarding-immigration/>

² Tessa Gervasini and Ken Oliver-Mendez, "Archbishop Naumann weighs in on need to solve current immigration, refugee challenges." Catholic News Agency. February 7, 2025. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/262093/archbishop-naumann-weighs-in-on-need-to-solve-current-immigration-refugee-challenges>

The above Bible citations call us to ensure the human rights of all people, whether citizens or immigrants. However, scripture also recognizes that immigrants are not entitled to everything that the Israelites were, namely the Passover. We read in [Exodus 12:43](#)

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This is the Passover statute. No foreigner may eat of it.

With this in mind, in the same passage we read

If any alien residing among you would celebrate the Passover for the Lord, all his males must be circumcised, and then he may join in its celebration just like the natives. But no one who is uncircumcised may eat of it” ([Exodus 12:48](#)).

What does this mean for us today? I see it as the Lord’s instruction that we must offer a path to citizenship for those who wish to come to our country. I do not mean that our borders should be open to **everyone** who wishes to immigrant here. We need to discern how many immigrants we can allow and under what circumstances. We need to treat them in accord with who they are, children of God. We must not mistreat them (see [Leviticus 19:33](#)), oppress, or afflict them (see [Exodus 22:20](#)).

The oppression of immigrants must stop. We must heed the words offered through the prophet Jeremiah

Only if you thoroughly reform your ways and your deeds; if each of you deals justly with your neighbor; if you no longer oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow; if you no longer shed innocent blood in this place or follow after other gods to your own harm, only then will I let you continue to dwell in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors long ago and forever ([Jeremiah 7:5-7](#)).

We must treat **everyone** with the dignity they deserve. To do so is, in accord with the words found in our *Declaration of Independence*. With the rights we receive, we receive a responsibility to ensure these rights for others. This is part of **justice**.

If we treat immigrants unjustly, we better remember what [Psalm 146:9](#) tells us

The Lord protects the resident alien, comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the way of the wicked.

Jesus healed non-Jews (for an example see [Matthew 15:21-28](#) where Jesus heals the Canaanite woman’s daughter).

Jesus tells us the greatest the greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to love our neighbor. Some people define “neighbor” narrowly. Jesus extends it broadly in The Parable of the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:29-37](#)).

Jesus tells us in [Matthew 25:31-46](#) that we will be judged by how we provide or do not provide for those in need through corporal works of mercy. The Third Corporal Work of Mercy, “Welcome the Stranger.” is specifically geared to immigrants (for more on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, see my video presentation, [The Journey to Jesus: Acts of Mercy](#)).

To be clear, I am not condoning illegal immigration. As the Colorado Catholic bishops state, what is needed is balance.³ We need to remember that basic human rights trump out any issues of one’s legal status regarding citizenship.

More important than our national citizenship of earthly political nations is our citizenship in Heaven.⁴ We must honor our place as children of God above earthly politics.

Now, I would like to turn to the present raids on immigrants. Again, our government has a responsibility to ensure safety in our nation with regards to immigrants who are guilty of violent crimes such as rape and murder. However, the raids are causing fear even among *legal* immigrants. This violates their inalienable human rights from God for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Even worse is the present concern that there will be raids in churches. I have not heard of any such raids to date, but the fear is real because of a change in policy.⁵

Churches should not be subject to raids. God’s house is sacred. Remember how Jesus cleansed the temple on non-sacred activities (see [John 2:13-22](#)).

We also find a basis for prohibiting raids in churches in the First Amendment to our U.S. Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Such raids interfere with the “free exercise” of one’s religion. We must think not just of an individual targeted in a raid but everyone else present in the church service.

For them, we must uphold the fourth amendment

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

³ see Colorado Catholic Conference, “Statement on Immigration: Welcoming the Stranger, Protecting the Common Good.” January 24, 2025 as posted online at <https://cocatholic.org/bishop-letters/the-colorado-bishops-statement-on-immigration-welcoming-the-stranger-protecting-the-common-good/>

⁴ See [Philippians 3:20](#)

⁵⁵ Jonah McKeown, “Trump ends policy of treating churches as ‘sensitive locations’ for immigration raids” Catholic News Agency, January 22, 2025. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/261729/trump-ends-policy-of-treating-churches-as-sensitive-locations-for-immigration-raids>

We are nothing but hypocrites if we do not follow our own constitution.

The raids are supposed to be only against specific illegal immigrants known to have committed violent crimes. I pray this is true because profiling, in this case I mean targeting anyone who appears to look like a Hispanic immigrant (as well as looking like immigrants from any other region in the world) is immoral. Justice does not judge by appearance but by what is real. Profiling based on appearance is not justified with regard to immigration. A person can be a second or even a third-generation citizen and still look like an immigrant. I also think of my maternal grandmother who was Puerto Rican. She did not just look Hispanic. As a Puerto Rican, she was Hispanic. As a Puerto Rican, she was also part of the United States.

In establishing a just immigration policy, we must also distinguish between general immigrants and those who come as refugees because of political or religious oppression in their native countries. They deserve a safe place to live.

We must also consider conditions like poverty in the immigrants' home countries. One does not make the effort to immigrate internationally without strong reason.

As I conclude, I encourage everyone to pray that our government, as well as anyone else involved in the current immigration policies, be given the gift of the Holy spirit of counsel (aka right judgment) to

1. Carry out sound immigration policies
2. That they think before they speak (see my article from last week, ["Thoughtful Speech"](#))
3. Undertake the comprehensive immigration reform that is needed.

What reform is needed? I see it as three-fold. It needs to address:

1. Who can come to our country legally and how many should be allowed to enter each year
2. How we deal with those here illegally, including a path to citizenship (the general policy should not be dictated by the few who are guilty of violent crimes)
3. What can we do to help improve conditions in their native countries.

God has the answers if we allow him to guide us.

Peace,

Fr. Jeff