

Archdiocesan News Archive

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Ash Wednesday Homily Of Cardinal Roger M. Mahony

Each Lent gives us the opportunity to enter into the spirit of Jesus' call to embrace these forty days through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. I have found in past Lents that these days are most spiritually fruitful when I have focused upon one need, and then found ways to use prayer, fasting and almsgiving to that need.

For Lent 2007, I am planning to focus upon "Children in Special Need," and to encourage others in our Archdiocese to consider doing the same. Sadly, there are so many children in need here locally, across the country, and throughout the world. But these children are also a marvelous opportunity to bring God's comfort and grace to them during Lent. We enrich our own spiritual journeys when we reach out to others, but especially, when we reach out to children.

Who are some of those children in need?

- Children facing hunger and malnutrition right here in Southern California, as well as world-wide;
- Children who have suffered or continue to suffer neglect and abuse, even within the Church;
- Children who are enslaved to make products, or who are used in human trafficking;
- Children who are orphans or refugees in places such as Darfur, Africa;
- Children who are left without a father or mother because of their death while serving in our military forces;

- Children who do not receive an adequate education and are then forced to live in poverty most of their adult lives;
- Children who are homeless in our midst, and forced to live in cars or other dangerous shelters;
- Children without adequate health and dental care, both here locally as well as nationally;
- Children of immigrants who are caught in impossible legal struggles, with some children born in this country and therefore USA citizens but with undocumented parents; children left behind as undocumented parents are deported to their country of origin.

This is just a partial list of children in need or at risk—locally, nationally, and around the world. You will be able to list many others from your own knowledge and experience. I am recommending that you consider choosing a particular category of children at risk and devote your prayer, your personal sacrifices, and some charitable donations to assist that group of children.

This Lent, I am personally choosing the children of immigrants for my Lenten focus. The need is very great here in Southern California, and I see so many children and young people at risk because their parents are not documented, or because they themselves are not here legally. Many were brought to our country by parents seeking a more secure financial future for their families, and to help create a more productive economy for all of us.

My Lenten plans are to do the following:

1. Remembering immigrant children each day when celebrating Mass, in praying the Rosary, and in praying the Liturgy of the Hours;
2. Fasting and making personal sacrifices during the week to benefit immigrant children;
3. Making donations each week of Lent to various Catholic Charities outreach Centers that serve immigrant children in our Archdiocese;

4. Traveling to Washington, DC in early March to encourage Congress and our President to take active steps to pass meaningful, just and humane, comprehensive immigration reform legislation during 2007— reform that will keep families together and give children the opportunity to live happy lives, and grow to achieve their dreams without the fear of losing their parents or not having access to the tools to succeed;
5. Working closely with all immigrant groups and our immigration reform partners both to serve our immigrant families and children, as well as to advocate for their rights at the local, state, and national levels;
6. Encouraging Catholics across the Archdiocese to join me in focusing upon immigrant children during Lent 2007.

Today, Ash Wednesday, I have invited a representative group of immigrant children to join us at this Mass. They represent the many children and young people who greatly need our help to bring about just and humane, comprehensive immigration reform. They are the real, human dimension of the immigration reform effort, not simply statistics or abstract political theory, and they certainly are not a danger to our community. They are a blessing to all of us.

Once we begin to see these children in a personal way, we can then focus our prayer, sacrifices, and actions to assist them. It is easy to forget that our broken immigration system hurts real people, families and especially children. They are innocents impacted by an unjust system that has failed and will continue to fail them and our society until true comprehensive reform is passed by Congress and the President.

We are able to see the face of God clearly in these young people, and hold them close to our hearts and prayers during our Lenten journey.

Please remember these children or another group of children at risk or in need for your own Lenten focus.

You will find each of the forty days of Lent far more meaningful and powerful in your discipleship with Jesus Christ, and when we arrive at Easter Sunday, we will experience ever more deeply the joys of Christ's victory over sin and death, and truly know that Lent 2007 has benefited those children who are most vulnerable in our midst.