

## Immigration: A Catholic Response

St. Catherine Newman Center

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I would like to thank Father Peter Rogers, OP, for the invitation to participate in this year's Aquinas Lecture. It is a welcome opportunity to be able to speak to you all today: members of the Newman Center, faculty and staff of the University of Utah, parishioners and guests.

Some time ago, I had the pleasure of joining the Dominican Friars for evening prayer and supper, an evening I still remember with great joy. The prayer was quite effective, with more than enough grace to spill over to the dining table! The Dominicans are not only good preachers but they are also good cooks! I will be back soon, I am sure! That evening, we briefly touched on this lecture and decided that immigration would be a relevant and compelling topic for my talk. And so, I wish to spend the next half hour or so on the topic of immigration and inclusion, looking through the lens of our Catholic perspective. At the end of the lecture, I welcome questions and comments. If the questions get too tough for me, then we will just stick with comments and call it a day!

In speaking about immigrants or people on the move, I am reminded of a little anecdote regarding a grammar school Christmas pageant. This story involved a little first grader who was selected to play the part of the innkeeper in his school's Christmas play. He practiced day and night, although he only had two short lines, "There's no room in the inn. Go away!" (repeat) His parents were very patient and he was the best-prepared actor ever! The night of the performance, Joseph and Mary knocked on the door and his moment came. "There's no room in the inn," he shouted, "but why don't you come in anyway and we'll have milk and graham crackers!" Well, it brought the house down!

There was a wonderful instinct in that little guy. A marvelous sense of hospitality, compassion and warmth all rolled into one loving embrace. I believe that we human beings come by that naturally. We are social creatures and we are by nature interested in each other and even caring of each other. But what happens to that instinct? Where does it go as we mature? Where do the fences come from? All of a sudden, we hear, "not in my backyard" or "I was here first" or "welcome to such and such a place, now go home" or "certain people need not apply."

A friend of mine recently summed it up well. She said that, as a country, we do not open our arms to strangers as widely as we used to. Whatever the reason, the mood in our country has changed and yet, I believe one could make the case that we are more prosperous, more powerful, more gifted now than ever before in our history. Do Emma Lazarus' words, engraved on the base of the

stature of liberty, ring true today? “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...”

During the next few minutes, I would challenge you and me to be present to our inner attitudes toward the stranger in our midst. I mean to speak about the national debate taking place in our country currently, but I also believe that we must examine our own hearts if we wish to convert others’.

There is no doubt in my mind that immigration is one of the most important social issues facing our country today. It affects not only a few States along the border or our big cities—it impacts virtually every community in our nation. This is much different from twenty or thirty years ago. Since that time, our nation has experienced an unprecedented wave of immigration. How we handle immigration now will determine the future of our country—and the type of country we are—for the twenty-first century.

Some of you might ask why the Catholic Church would speak out on the issue of immigration. It is primarily because of the Gospel mandate to “welcome the stranger,” with strong roots in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy warns Israel that “the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, almighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and who loves the stranger, providing them food and clothing” (Dt. 10-17-18). Israel’s care for the stranger was to be guided by God’s command and their own experience: “You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Dt. 10-12).

The theme of hospitality is seen in the New Testament as well, in which Jesus instructs us to “welcome the stranger,” for what “you do to the least of my brothers, you do unto me” (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus Himself was a refugee who fled the terror of Herod into Egypt with the Holy Family (Matthew 2:13-2:23) Jesus also was an itinerant preacher who preached throughout Galilee and Judea but who had no home of his own: “The foxes have their lairs, the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His Head” (Lk. 9:58). In the Catholic tradition, in the face of the migrant we see the face of Christ. Repeatedly, we see that movement to places of hope is woven into the fabric of Scripture, a movement that continue throughout our Church’s history.

Many papal encyclicals underscore our call to welcome the stranger in our midst. In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII established the right of a person to work to survive and to support a family. In the apostolic constitution *Exsul Familia*, Pope Pius XII reaffirmed that migrants have a right to a life of dignity, and therefore a right to migrate toward that end. The right to migrate and the right not to migrate was underscored in Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris*. This theme was echoed by Pope John Paul II when he addressed the New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants in 1985: “Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to migrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership to the human family, nor of citizenship in the universal society, the common, world-wide

fellowship of men.” Finally, the bishops of the United States in their pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, put forward five basic rights of immigrants and the nations who accept them. I will say more on this pastoral later in this talk.

I also note that we are involved in this issue because the Catholic Church in this country is itself an immigrant Church that has grown with the newcomers who have arrived on our shores. Today, the Church in the United States has members from countries all over the world— countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. In a phrase reminiscent of that well-known toy store: “Immigrants R Us.”

As an immigrant Church, we are part of the immigrant experience. As pastors, educators, and social service providers, the Bishops of this country are painfully aware of the plight of immigrants. We are approached for legal, pastoral, social and emotional assistance on a daily basis. Sadly, we witness families being separated, migrant workers being exploited, and families mourning the death of loved ones who die on their journey to the United States. The Church is present at every point of migration—in the “sending communities,” along the route, along the border, and in receiving communities. Catholics are involved in migration as elected officials, border patrol agents, service providers, and as migrants. We bishops have an obligation to show leadership on this issue, so that Catholics can work together for a just solution.


In short, the Church has a great deal of experience with migration, and thus much to offer in understanding this complex reality. Unlike many

commentators and contributors to the debate, we see it from a global perspective, which informs our view and the solutions we offer and support. We are a universal institution and unlike other commentators, we do not see the issue only in economic, social, or cultural terms. To the Church, the immigration issue is primarily a humanitarian one. Because it affects the human rights, human dignity, and the *lives* of millions of human beings, it has moral implications and must be viewed through a moral lens. This is primarily why the Church is involved in this important issue.

Moreover, the recent renewal of the Bishops' Pastoral Letter *Faithful Citizenship* gives yet another perspective as to why the Church is involved in the public debate on the issue of immigration. Paragraph thirteen reads:


In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, "It is necessary that all participate, each according to his (or her) position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person...As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" (nos. 1913-1915).

And in the following paragraph of the same document, we read that "[t]he Catholic call to faithful citizenship affirms the importance of political participation and insists that public service is a worthy vocation."

For all these reasons, then, and no doubt many more, the Catholic Church is right in the thick of the immigration conversation, or debate if you prefer, in the  United States. From our study and participation in this discourse, many of us bishops believe that the United States immigration system has an adverse

impact on the rights, dignity, and lives of human beings and must be reformed. Let us look at some of the facts.

While the Bishops are not global economic experts, it is clear that half of the earth's inhabitants live in poverty and struggle to maintain their dignity, health, indeed their very survival. In our hemisphere, such poverty exists in our country as well as in Mexico and Latin America. In this hemisphere and other parts of the world, workers migrate in order to support their families because they can find work elsewhere and normally make much more in wages than in their home country.

This is true in the United States. The overwhelming majority of migrants simply want to work, and they work hard and contribute to the American economy. They labor in important industries in our economy—agriculture, construction, and service – and overall contribute through their taxes, purchasing power, and “sweat equity.” They pay into the income, property, and sales tax system and into the Social Security system every year. In fact, undocumented immigrants pay \$700 million into the Social Security system each year yet do not benefit from it. As five percent of the workforce, they pay as much as \$3 billion in income taxes each year, not including sales and property taxes. Studies show that over an immigrants' lifetime, they contribute more than they consume in services. I read in the Tribune's public forum yesterday  an interesting letter to the editor from Caitlin Cahill who said that immigrants are people “who come here with little, work for little and ask for little...” I quite agree.

In short, our immigration system is outmoded and ill-equipped to accommodate the migration flows that reflect this new era of globalization, present here and all over the world. As many as 500,000 migrants without legal status come to the United States each year, 40 percent by overstaying their visas. Approximately 90 percent obtain work within six months. Despite these numbers, our immigration system allots only 5,000 immigrant visas each year for low-skilled workers. This represents a broken system.


Instead of trying to update an outmoded system based on illegality with a modern system based upon legal status and legal migration, our nation has employed an enforcement-only approach, an approach that has failed and led to more human suffering. Since 1993, when our nation commenced a series of border blockade initiatives, we have spent close to \$30 billion on enforcement, tripled the number of Border Patrol agents, and added 80 miles of fencing and barriers to our border. During the same period, the number of undocumented persons has more than doubled, from 5 million in the 1990 census to almost 12 million today. It is clear that an enforcement-only prescription does not work.

As a result of this outmoded system, migrants, desperate to survive and support their families, are compelled to enter the country illegally and, because of their undocumented status, become subject to abuse, exploitation, and even death in the desert. According to the Border Patrol, over 3,000 migrants have died in the American desert since 1996. Families are continually separated and in some cases are never reunited.

In short, our national immigration policies are not consistent, but contradictory. While we post a “no trespassing” sign at our border, we erect a “help wanted” sign at the workplace. This incongruent policy leads not only to division and discord in state and local communities – which must bear the initial costs of new arrivals – but also to the exploitation, abuse, and even death of our fellow human beings.

Now, with comprehensive immigration reform having failed in Congress, we see enforcement raids that separate children from their parents and strike fear in immigrant communities. We see state and local law enforcement targeting immigrants instead of pursuing real criminals. In addition, we witness state and local communities passing laws designed to drive immigrants from these areas.

To compound matters, the political season has begun and some are using immigration for perceived political gains. Undocumented immigrants have become the subject of harsh rhetoric by some elected officials, presidential candidates, and other commentators. This current national atmosphere breeds cynicism and despair, lessens us as a people, and contains elements of racism and xenophobia.

So, how does the Church propose to correct such an unjust and inhumane system? I would like to share with you five principles that govern how the Church looks at immigration law and the immigration system. These come from a joint pastoral letter, Strangers No Longer: Together  on the Journey of Hope, from the Catholic Bishops of the United States and Mexico, released in 2003.



### 1) Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland

This principle states that a person has a right not to migrate. In other words, economic and political conditions in their homeland should provide an opportunity for a person to work and support his or her family in dignity and safety. In public policy terms, efforts should be made to address global economic inequities through just trade practices, economic development, and debt relief. Peacemaking efforts should be advanced to end conflict that forces persons to flee their homes.

Several years ago I had the moving and yet sad experience of visiting Burmese refugees in northern Thailand. In the Mae Hong Son area there were thousand of these refuges, many of whom have been there since the mid 1980's. When we asked them if they would like to relocate in the United States, many said "no." They were waiting for things to change in what is now called Myanmar so they could go back home. After all those years in primitive, camp conditions, they still yearned to return to their homes and farms. People, given the opportunity, most often want to remain home, an inalienable right of all human beings.

### 2) Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families

When persons are unable to find work and support themselves and their families, they have a right to migrate to other countries and work. This right is not absolute, since Pope John XXIII stated that this right applies when "there are just reasons for it." However, in the current condition of the world, in which global poverty is rampant, migrants who leave their homes and risk their lives to

enter a nation are seeking to survive and support their families, a just reason for migration. This principle supports the public policy position of the Church in support of the legalization of undocumented persons.

During that same trip I mentioned just a bit ago, we also went to Northeastern China to visit North Korean refugees. Although we could not meet with them officially out of fear for their safety, we talked to the local parish priest, himself just coming off house arrest for assisting them. He told us the conditions were abysmal in North Korea and that thousands of refugees were risking death or long prison sentences and hard labor in order to flee the hunger, despair and persecution they were experiencing in their country. It is true that they were technically breaking the laws of both North Korea and China but they were exercising a God given right to migrate, especially since they certainly had “just reasons.”

### 3) Sovereign nations have a right to control their borders

The Church recognizes the right of the sovereign to protect and control its borders in the service of the common good of its citizens. However, this is not an absolute right. Nations also have an obligation to the universal common good, as articulated by Pope John XXII in *Pacem in Terris*, and thus should seek to accommodate migration to the greatest extent possible. Powerful economic nations, such as the United States, have a higher obligation to serve the universal common good. In the current global environment, in which there are jobs in the United States that immigrants fill, the United States should establish

an immigration system that provides legal avenues for persons to enter the nation legally in a safe, orderly, and dignified manner. In other words, according to the Church's view, nations are obligated to exercise their right of sovereignty with compassion and prudence, seeking to achieve a common good that goes beyond any one country's borders.

#### 4) Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection

Persons who flee their home countries because they fear persecution should be afforded safe haven and protection in another country. Conflict and political unrest in many parts of the world force persons to leave their homes for the fear of death or harm. The United States should employ a refugee and asylum system that does not erect high barriers to prevent persons from obtaining safety in our country.

#### 5) The human rights and the human dignity of undocumented migrants should be respected

Persons who enter a nation without permission should be treated with respect and dignity. They should not be detained in deplorable conditions for lengthy periods, shackled by their feet and hands, or abused in any manner. They should be afforded due process of the law and allowed to articulate a fear of return to their home before a qualified adjudicator. They should not be blamed for the social ills of a nation.

These broad yet basic principles provide a general framework for the development of a fair and just immigration policy. While these principles do not yield detailed legislation, they do provide a lens through which proposed measures can be judged and evaluated. The challenge is always in moving from general principles to concrete policy. Often times, it requires reconciling rights that are held in tension with one another.

For instance, how is it that, on the one hand, a person has a right to migrate out of economic necessity or to protect his life and that of his family and, on the other hand, a sovereign nation has the right to control its borders? Do these principles not conflict?

The answer lies in the fact that neither of these rights is absolute. They must be balanced by several factors including the ability of the receiving country to receive immigrants and that of the immigrant's home country to provide economic opportunity. Still, a more powerful and stable economic country like the United States may have a higher obligation to receive immigrants than a poorer, less developed neighbor. Two factors should shape our response: first, the capacity of the United States to accept immigrants, and; secondly, recognition that our economy needs and benefits from this immigrant labor force. To reap such tremendous benefits from an immigrant labor force without reciprocating with opportunities for those workers to regularize their status is not just.

In attempting to reform a broken system, what policy solutions do the Church offer that comport with these principles?

Just as we look at immigration from a global perspective, we favor a global solution. First, we need to examine the root causes of migration and analyze how U.S. economic and trade policies influence economic flight. Over the long term, we also must consider how living wage employment can be generated in “sending communities.” Migrants, overall, would prefer to remain in their home communities to support themselves and their families. Migration should be driven by choice, not necessity.

Second, we must comprehensively address and update the broken U.S. immigration system. The United States Congress must return to the matter of immigration and show the courage and leadership they have been elected to show. The central feature of this effort should be to bring the 12 million undocumented immigrants out of the shadows and offer them legal status. In return, these immigrants must learn English, pay a fine, and work for several years before earning the right to receive permanent legal status. Also included in this package is a new visa worker program, to allow more migrant workers to enter legally, and updates to our family-based immigration system.

Of course, critics call this prescription an “amnesty.” I would like to address that assertion, since it seems to resonate among some portions of the American public. First, we must consider whether an earned path to citizenship is itself an amnesty, which means, according to Webster’s Dictionary, “an act of forgiving, a general pardon of the offenses of subjects against the government.” By requiring at least six or more years of work, the payment of fees and a fine, as well as English proficiency, we are not forgiving or providing a general pardon.

We are exacting a penalty for an offense. The principle of the “rule of law,” upon which our democracy is built, is maintained because the offenders pay a penalty and remain accountable to the law.

Some will argue that the penalties imposed in an earned citizenship program are insignificant and not commensurate to the offense. They also suggest they are irrelevant because, at the end of the program, an individual becomes eligible for citizenship and thus receive a “reward” for lawbreaking. I respectfully disagree.

In exacting punishment in our country, courts and legislatures consider both the intent of the lawbreaking and the effect of the lawbreaking. In the case of the migrant, the intent is to work and support his or her family and the effect is that this work helps our economy to move forward. The *intent* is not to harm and the *effect* is to help, thus mitigating the penalty. As for the arduous path to citizenship that persons must take, individuals must wait in the back of the line and, under many proposals, wait as long as eleven to thirteen years before becoming eligible for citizenship.

I would say that we want Americans who are willing to sacrifice for the value of citizenship, a value many Americans take for granted. More importantly, citizenship ensures that America does not employ a permanent underclass without full rights in the society, a hallmark of our democracy.

In considering the penalty for unlawful migration, we also must consider whether the law that has been broken is itself a just one. This also should mitigate the penalty exacted. In the history of the United States, we have

enacted and implemented several unjust laws, including laws that have discriminated against certain types of persons based on race, gender, and national origin. We just celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. In Dr. King's letters from a Birmingham jail, he details that an unjust law—one that violates the human dignity of the person---should engender civil disobedience. While I am not advocating such action in this case, I would argue that our current immigration laws are unjust as well: we employ and accept the labor and taxes of the undocumented yet deny them the protection of the law. As a matter of moral principle, we cannot have it both ways.


Let me address another criticism leveled at those who favor comprehensive reform, including criticism of the Church. Simply because we do not support an enforcement-only approach to the problem of illegal immigration does not mean we support "open borders" or do not support efforts to secure our country. In fact, it is our belief that a comprehensive approach will best help us secure our nation.

First, it will bring the undocumented population out of the shadows by offering them legal status, requiring them to identify themselves to the government. Is it not better to know who is in our country, so that we can distinguish between those who are here to work and pursue the American dream and those here for nefarious purposes?

Second, it will create legal avenues for migrants to enter in a safe and orderly manner, so that we know who is entering our country and for what purpose. Legal avenues for migration would also reduce the pressure on our

southern border, permitting law enforcement to focus upon drug smugglers, human traffickers, and other criminal or terrorist elements.

Moreover, the enforcement of U.S. immigration law need not be conducted in a manner that undermines basic human dignity. Enforcement raids, for example, fail to meet this test, as they separate parents from children and alienate immigrant communities. We experienced this in Utah on December 12, 2006, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe of all days! Several hundred immigrants without appropriate documentation were deported to their home countries. Children came home to empty houses. It is hard to image the fear and anxiety of both parents and children as they scrambled to find out what was happening. The sacred bond between parent and child must be honored and not used as a cudgel that in effect does nothing to improve the situation one way or the other.

In this regard, comprehensive immigration reform also has the benefit of protecting families, which is the cornerstone of the church position. By legalizing the undocumented population, families are kept together by providing legal status to all family members. As many as 52 percent of immigrant families are of “mixed” status, in which at least one family member is undocumented—in many cases,  the parents have no legal status while the children are U.S. citizens. Thus, reform prevents families from being ripped apart in harsh enforcement actions. Reform of our family immigration system will ensure that families are reunited in a more timely fashion. Currently, a Mexican legal permanent resident must wait as long as 10 years through the legal immigration system to

bring a spouse and child to the United States. Such long waits encourage undocumented immigration and the loss of mothers and children in the Sonoran desert.

An approach to the immigration debate informed by the riches of the Catholic tradition respects the human dignity of our fellow human beings, does not scapegoat them for our social problems, and does not pit one community against another. All too often we hear and see, on cable television, talk radio, and on our streets, voices of fear and dissension that dehumanize immigrants. The faith community, in particular, must speak out against these divisive voices with the strong message that immigrants who come to this nation are equal in God's eyes, work hard, share American values, and love and worship God as we do.

Today, I challenge us to enter this debate and confront those who use the immigration issue to divide neighbor against neighbor. Do we want to live in a country that employs a permanent underclass? Do we want to live in communities divided by fear and suspicion? Do we want to live in a society that discriminates and marginalizes based on an unjust law? These are questions we must consider, take seriously, and respond to, in our words and deeds, with a resounding "no."

In this regard, I have an immediate assignment for us. I feel like a teacher again! Our support is needed for an important piece of immigration reform. It is called the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, better known as the DREAM Act, and sponsored by Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois. What

does the DREAM Act do? It permits young persons, like you, who are foreign-born, without legal status, and have lived in the United States at least five years an opportunity to adjust their status and eventually become citizens. By completing at least two years of college or vocational training, these young persons—about 65,000 a year—would receive permanent legal status within six years, eventually leading to citizenship. This is not an amnesty, because the young persons who would qualify came to this country with their parents at a younger age and are without legal status through no fault of their own. Other than their legal status, they are Americans. What the DREAM Act does is give these students a future in our country, a chance to become American citizens and fully contribute to our nation. I ask that you contact our Senators and ask them to support the DREAM Act.

Closer to home, Utah has its own version of the Dream Act, a much simpler law that gives any student who has graduated from a Utah high school the right to attend a State-supported college or university at in-state tuition rates. Recently, legislation has been introduced to repeal Utah's Dream Act. This is one of the many immigration bills proposed in the Utah Legislative Session that began last Monday and continues through March 5. I believe that qualified children of undocumented workers should continue to have the opportunity to pay in-state tuition rates at state colleges.

I also believe that the undocumented should continue to be issued Driver's Privilege Cards. Everyone benefits when drivers are properly trained in Utah's driving laws, drivers are registered with accurate addresses, and all drivers are

covered with motor vehicle insurance. As Tony Yapias, director of Proyecto Latino de Utah and former state Hispanic Affairs director said in the Salt Lake Tribune several days ago, “the audit shows that undocumented immigrants are doing their best to comply with the law by getting a driving privilege card and auto insurance.” Because of the privilege card’s apparent success, it is hard for me to see why the burden of proof should not be on those who say the program is defective. In the meantime, we should support such an obvious boon for all of us using the public roadways.

I agree with the police chiefs of sixty major cities including our own Salt Lake City Police Chief, Chris Burbank, that local and state law enforcement should not be burdened with immigration enforcement. Such an assignment would jeopardize the efforts to establish trust in minority communities and cause people not to come forward with reports of crimes such as drug activity and domestic violence. Just yesterday, the Tribune reported that there are those who believe that if our local law enforcement personnel are empowered to act under the auspices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, it would “instill even more fear into the undocumented community, increase racial profiling and crowd jails with undocumented workers, including those with no criminal record, waiting to be picked up by ICE.”

It is important that your Utah legislators hear from you that you value the dignity of each person and are not consumed by fear of the stranger in our midst. Again, the words of *Faithful Citizenship* ring true: “...this is not a time for retreat or discouragement; rather, it is a time for renewed engagement...Catholic

lay women and men can become actively involved: running for office, working within political parties; communicating their concerns and positions to elected officials; and joining diocesan social mission or advocacy networks...” (FC, Paragraph 16) Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, echoes this same sentiment in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. He states, “The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful” (no. 29).

In this political participation, it is important that we seek civil conversations with those who disagree with us and try to find common ground. That common ground is an agreement that our immigration laws are inadequate, they need to be comprehensively reformed, and that we can work together to insure that this happens at the federal level.

The contributions of immigrants are what have made America what it is today—a nation of immigrants who together have built the greatest democracy and superpower on earth. To abandon this legacy could change the character of our nation in the twenty-first century and dim our prospects for the future. This is our challenge: to work to preserve America’s position as a leader and moral force in the world by keeping it as a beacon of hope and freedom to our fellow human beings around the globe.

Another way to put this challenge is to say that we are seeking a conversion of hearts in our country. By word and example, we are called upon by our God to reflect his image of love and inclusion by ourselves reaching out to others with compassion and concern. I am very heartened by the meeting between Representative David Litvack, M. Russell Ballard and other officials of

the LDS Church. It was reported that there was agreement that “we need to step back, not be so reactive and let cooler heads prevail.” “We must remember that we are talking about human beings.” And I would add, we are talking about our brothers and sisters who, with us, are part of Christ’s body, the Church. We will change hearts if we ourselves are willing to lead by example.

In the beginning of my reflections this afternoon I mentioned that you and I must continually examine our own attitudes toward the stranger in our midst. We must never fall into the false assumption that we are without bias as we seek to open our arms ever wider in embracing those who come to our shores. We must hone our listening skills as we allow others to tell their story. We must walk with those new to our land as they journey toward citizenship. We must take the risk of embracing other cultures so that our own traditions and customs will be enriched.

This Aquinas Lecture is starting to sound like a homily, so let me just fall all the way into this occupational hazard and conclude with a reference to two anonymous persons who were confronted with a stranger about two thousand years ago.

You will remember two very disillusioned followers of one who claimed to be the Messiah, walking from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. They met a person who fascinated them by his serene demeanor and incredible knowledge of the scriptures. He talked at length about the very person they were following, seeming to have an unspeakable intimacy with him. As the day wore on and night approached, they invited the stranger to come in with them for a meal. And

it was around that table of hospitality that they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. We are called to do no less. We are called to welcome the strangers in our midst, to hear their story, and to invite them to our table. When we do, we will once again recognize Jesus in our midst. I believe that when all is said and done, and despite what some might say, there is always room at the banquet table. Indeed, we are never too old to open the door wide and offer those who knock milk and graham crackers. Thank you very much for your attention this afternoon.