

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Each year on the Tuesday of Holy Week, the bishop of a diocese blesses and consecrates the holy oils to be used at Easter and through the coming year in local parishes. This happens at the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral. We have a bus going to the Cathedral. The bus will leave Concord at 9:00 am on Tuesday, April 11. The Chrism Mass is at 11:00 am and we will return to Concord by 2:00 pm. All are invited to attend the Chrism Mass, but the bus only holds 50 people. To reserve your seat, please call Jean Hull 978-369-4729.

A word about our liturgies for the Triduum in Holy Week. You'll see that the liturgy for Holy Thursday and Good Friday evenings begins at 7:30 but that the Easter Vigil begins at 8:30. The late start for the Easter Vigil is because the Vigil may not begin until one hour after nightfall. As in other faiths, some of our celebrations are determined by the sun and moon! These Holy Week liturgies are the most important and most beautiful celebrations the Church offers, and they take time. Especially since we are celebrating two adult baptisms at the Easter Vigil, that liturgy will be lengthy. I do not say this to dissuade anyone from coming! At the same time, newcomers to these rituals (and families with small children) may want to know ahead of time. And speaking of children, please know that we will have a special Good Friday children's service at 3:00 (to which "children of all ages" are invited) and that at the 9:30 Mass on Easter Sunday we will baptize Will McKeon, a five year old boy in our parish.

Each year I visit our about-to-be-confirmed high school students for an hour of "Ask Fr. Fleming Anything You Want to Ask!" Some of the students' questions at least hint at disagreement with Church teaching. I encouraged our young people to study and understand Church teaching as they grapple with it - an enterprise that would benefit all of us. The question of immigration policy is before the nation these days and our Church has a substantial contribution to make to the debate. Here, then, are three excerpts from Church documents: one from the work of Vatican Council II; one from Pope Benedict XVI; and one from Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, DC. This material is not always an easy read but the topics and concerns treated are of deep importance. I hope these will be of assistance for all of us as we consider this important question.

The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.

Now that the Second Vatican council has studied the mystery of the church more deeply, it addresses not only the daughters and sons of the church and all who call upon the name of Christ, but the whole of humanity as well, and it wishes to set down how it understands the presence and function of the church in the world of today. The world which the council has in mind is the world of women and men, the entire human family seen in its total environment. It is the world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and failures. It is the world which Christians believe has been created and is sustained by the love of its maker, has fallen into the slavery of sin but has been freed by Christ, who was crucified and rose again in order to break the stranglehold of the evil one, so that it might be fashioned anew according to God's design and brought to its fulfillment. Though proud of its discoveries and its power, humanity is often concerned about current developments in the world, about humanity's place and role in the universe, about the meaning of individual and collective endeavor and finally about the destiny of nature and of humanity. And so the council, as witness and guide to the faith of all of God's people, gathered together by Christ, can find no more eloquent expression of this people's solidarity, respect and love for the whole human family, of which it forms part, than to enter into dialogue with it about all these various problems, throwing the light of the Gospel on them and supplying humanity with the saving resources which the church has received from its founder under the promptings of the holy Spirit. It is the human person that is to be saved, human society which must be renewed. It is the human person, therefore, which is the key to this discussion, each individual human person in her or his totality, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will.

Taken from the 1965 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World ("Gaudium et Spes") from Vatican Council II, these words are a sweeping acknowledgment of the beauty of humanity and the world in which we live. The Church's identification with people in their struggles and pain and the desire to enter into dialogue about the destiny of nature and of humanity itself makes of the Church a partner in the search for truth, a partner whose age and wisdom has much to offer and much to receive. To name the human person as the key to this discussion reveals the Church as cognizant of the terms and reality of human experience in our own times.

Pope Benedict XVI in his statement on World Migration Day in January 2006 articulated a connection between the Vatican II document quoted above and a particular immigration concern: the feminization of migration and its inherent dangers. Here is an excerpt from that statement:

Forty years ago, the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes made a careful analysis of the complexities of the world today, seeking the ways best suited to bring the Gospel message to the men and women of today. To this end the Council Fathers in response to the appeal of Blessed John XXIII undertook to examine the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel... One of the recognizable signs of the times today is undoubtedly migration, a phenomenon which during the century just ended can be said to have taken on structural characteristics, becoming an important factor of the labor market world-wide, a consequence among other things of the enormous drive of globalization. Naturally in this "sign of the times" various factors play a part. They include both national and international migration, forced and voluntary migration, legal and illegal migration, subject also to the scourge of

trafficking in human beings. Nor can the category of foreign students, whose numbers increase every year in the world, be forgotten.

With regard to those who emigrate for economic reasons, a recent fact deserving mention is the growing number of women involved. In the past it was mainly men who emigrated, although there were always women too, but these emigrated in particular to accompany their husbands or fathers or to join them wherever they were. Today, although numerous situations of this nature still exist, female emigration tends to become more and more autonomous. Women cross the border of their homeland alone in search of work in another country. Indeed it often happens that the migrant woman becomes the principal source of income for her family. It is a fact that the presence of women is especially prevalent in sectors that offer low salaries. If, then, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, this is even more so in the case of women. The most common employment opportunities for women, other than domestic work, consist in helping the elderly, caring for the sick and work in the hotel sector. These, too, are areas where Christians are called to dedicate themselves to assuring just treatment for migrant women out of respect for their femininity in recognition of their equal rights.

In this context it is necessary to mention trafficking in human beings – especially women – which flourishes where opportunities to improve their standard of living or even to survive are limited. It becomes easy for the trafficker to offer his own "services" to the victims, who often do not even vaguely suspect what awaits them. In some cases there are women and girls who are destined to be exploited almost like slaves in their work, and not infrequently in the sex industry too. Though I cannot here closely examine the analysis of the consequences of this aspect of migration, I make my own the condemnation voiced by John Paul II against "the widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality."

The following March 2006 statement of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, DC, on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Cardinal McCarrick's statement is a good representation of the thinking of American bishops on this matter. (Cardinal O'Malley has not addressed the issue yet.)

I am pleased to be here today with my fellow interfaith leaders to speak about a subject which has a profound impact on our nation--the issue of immigration. Today, as we speak to you, the U.S. Senate is poised to consider legislation which could change how our country responds to the newcomer, to the downtrodden, and to the oppressed who come to our shores seeking a better life. It is an important time, and it is vital that all American citizens, most particularly members of faith communities, understand the present moment in which we live and act to ensure that our nation does not forsake her immigrant history.

As we all know, immigration is not a simple issue, but one that evokes strong passions and economic, legal, social, and national security debates. We are here today, representing our individual faith communities, because we believe that immigration is not just a theoretical policy issue, but ultimately a humanitarian issue that impacts the basic dignity and life of the person, created in the image and likeness of God. It is because of its impact on basic human dignity and human life that we believe immigration is, first and foremost, a moral issue.

All sides in the debate agree on one thing: our nation's immigration policy is flawed and needs to be repaired. It is a matter of human justice. Every day, we in the Catholic Church see the human consequences of this flawed system. Our parishes, agencies, hospitals, and pastoral ministries are called upon daily to respond to the many needs of new immigrants, hard-working people who have fled their homeland in despair and fear. They ask us for a loving heart, a helping hand, for medical care, legal assistance, and counseling. We see families separated, workers exploited, and migrants abused by smugglers and who sometimes even die in the desert.

Changing the status quo is an issue of moral gravity. Our nation must create an immigration response that is humane, while also serving our nation's economic and national security needs. Any legislation must include:

- *policy directions which address the root causes of migration, such as economic development, so that migrants can remain in their home countries to support themselves and their families;*
- *reform of our legal immigration system, including the adoption of an earned legalization program for undocumented workers and their families; a temporary worker program with appropriate protections for both U.S. and foreign workers; and reform of the family preference system, so families can be reunited in a timely fashion;*
- *restoration of due process protections for immigrants to allow them to have "their day in court," consistent with American values.*

These elements are best embodied in S. 1033/H.R. 2330, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005. As the Senate Judiciary Committee and the full U.S. Senate begin consideration of a Senate bill, we ask that principles embodied in the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act receive strong consideration and support. We also ask that the Agricultural Jobs, Opportunity, Benefits, and Security Act (AgJOBS) legislation, which helps our nation's farm workers, and the DREAM Act, which assists undocumented students who came to our nation through no fault of their own, and the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act are included in any final legislative package. In our view, only a comprehensive approach to immigration reform will effectively address our nation's immigration crisis. This is why the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) strongly opposes H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Act of 2005, an enforcement-only bill which was passed by the House of Representatives in December.

Let me be clear. The Catholic Church acknowledges and supports the right of a sovereign nation to secure its borders, most particularly at a time in which national security is in question. However, we believe H.R. 4437 goes well beyond the issue of national security, is overly broad and punitive, and would bring undue harm to immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees. If enacted, H.R. 4437 would alter basic American values of fairness and due process and severely weaken our asylum and refugee protection system. Its scope and reach would extend to U.S. citizens as well, including those, such as our own parishioners, who offer, in an act of mercy, basic sustenance to an undocumented migrant. In short, H.R. 4437 would fundamentally change the heritage of our nation as a welcoming, compassionate, and open society, a heritage which has made us the strong nation we are today. We urge its defeat...

I hope this material will be helpful for all who take the time to read and study it.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming