

You can't worship the child in the manger, but then gas the child at the border.

Christmas 2018

Dear Friends:

A week ago we celebrated Santa Con in San Francisco. This annual craziness started here years ago and has spread to other cities. The so-called millennials didn't create it but they've made it their own. Thousands of young adults, dressed in Santa Claus outfits, spend the day in a city-wide pub crawl. By sunset the streets are full of seriously plastered Santas. Some of my fellow recovering alcoholics (It'll be 30 years on April 17th; praise God!) find the whole thing repulsive but I, for whatever reason, regard it as perversely funny, even charming.

What I do NOT find charming, what ignites every moral fiber in my 75 year old body and soul, is what our government is doing to people seeking asylum at our Southern border. The President slanders them as "murderers and rapists". To me, instead, they seem to personify what Stingo, in Sophie's Choice, called "the butchered and betrayed and martyred children of the earth." A world order choking on its greed and lust for power creates refugees but then dismisses them, denies them and denounces them. The glimpse (on TV news) of kids, some toddlers, taken from their parents' arms, put in cages and then subjected to the travesty of a court hearing for their "crimes" gives new meaning to the word "obscenity". If this isn't "social sin", then what is? All done, of course, in our names and paid for with our taxes.

If you're thinking "Oh, Fitz? How about a nice Christmas letter for a change?", please remember that I've spent my whole adult life with one foot planted in "church nice" and the other stuck, gladly, in "church militant" (as a writer recently described the divergent American church scene). Oh, did I forget to mention the obvious: that the "reason for the season" is to celebrate the story of a Palestinian child whose parents fled across an international border, fleeing violence, in the hope of finding asylum in a neighboring country?

A big salute to my fellow Notre Dame grad, Mary Meg McCarthy, whose National Center for Immigrant Justice has organized more than 1,500 lawyers to volunteer their time and talent, serving these persons. And a loving "Brava!" as well to my church friends (Roman Catholic Women Priests) who have visited, spent time with, escorted to court hearings, and helped find housing for some of the women already here, facing deportation as their asylum cases drag on and on. In the words of a favorite African American spiritual, "There's another witness for my God!"

And here is something truly lovely that I want to share with you. It was composed a few years ago by a Cuban-American Presbyterian pastor named Jose Luis Casal. It really doesn't need any more introduction

THE IMMIGRANT'S CREED

I believe in Almighty God, who guided the people in exile and in exodus, the God of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon, the god of foreigners and immigrants.

I believe in Jesus Christ, a displaced Galilean, who was born away from his people and his home, who fled his country with his parents when his life was in danger, and returning to his own country suffered the oppression of the tyrant Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power, who then was persecuted, beaten, and finally tortured, accused and condemned to death unjustly.

But on the third day, this scorned Jesus rose from the dead, not as a foreigner but to offer us citizenship in heaven.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal immigrant from God's kingdom among us, who speaks all languages, lives in all countries, and reunites all races.

I believe that the church is the secure home for the foreigner and for all believers who constitute it, who speak the same language and have the same purpose.

I believe that the Communion of the Saints begins when we accept the diversity of the saints.

I believe in the forgiveness, which makes us all equal, and in the reconciliation, which identifies us more than does race, language or nationality.

I believe that in the Resurrection God will unite us as one people in which all are distinct and all are alike at the same time. Beyond this world, I believe in Life Eternal in which no one will be an immigrant but all will be citizens of God's realm, which will never end. Amen.

This has been a wonderful year for me.

+ Got to visit a bunch of old longtime friends, see some fun shows and hear a lot of soul-stirring music. (How often do you get to hear the Mahler 3rd twice in one year?)

+ My right leg continues to torment. And there are other laments, but they usually disappear as soon as I hand a tray of food to one of our guests at St. Anthony's.

+ Blue has always been my favorite color, never more so than this past November.

+ My heart continues to ache for friends who have gone home, too early, and for those whose hearts are heavy with grief.

To close: the best advice I heard all year.

When times are plentiful, build a longer table, not a higher wall.

