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Editorial

Opening Our Hearts

In a moment filled with powerful political symbolism, Pope Francis prayed on February 17, 2016 at Mexico's northern border for the thousands of migrants who have died trying to reach the United States and appealed for governments to open their hearts, if not their borders, to the “human tragedy that is forced migration.” “No more death! No more exploitation!” he implored.

It was the most poignant moment of Francis' five-day trip to Mexico and one of the most powerful images in recent times: History's first Latin American pope, who has demanded countries to welcome people fleeing persecution, war and poverty, praying at the border between Mexico and US.

In his homily, Francis called for “open hearts” and recognition of the problems facing humanity today. “We cannot deny the humanitarian crisis which in recent years has meant the migration of thousands of people, whether by train or highway or on foot, crossing hundreds of kilometers through mountains, deserts and inhospitable zones,” he said. “They are our brothers and sisters, who are being expelled by poverty and violence, drug trafficking and organized crime.”

And then, in a pointed message, Francis added a politically charged greeting to the 30,000 people gathered in the Sun Bowl to watch the simulcast on giant TV screens. “Thanks to the help of technology, we can pray, sing and celebrate together this merciful love which the Lord gives us, and which no frontier can prevent us from sharing.”

In a speech to workers and employers, Francis warned that without job opportunities, Mexico's youth risk being seduced into the drug trade. "Poverty becomes the best breeding ground for the young to fall into the cycle of drug-trafficking and violence," he said.

Do you want to leave them the memory of exploitation, of insufficient pay, of workplace harassment?" he asked the employers. "What air will they breathe? An air tainted by corruption, violence, insecurity and suspicion or, on the contrary, an air capable of generating alternatives, renewal and change?" Further, "God will hold today's slave-drivers accountable," he warned.

On the final day of his visit, Francis visited the Prison in Ciudad Juarez, a city that was once considered the murder capital of the world. Francis greeted a few dozen inmates clad in gray sweatsuits and white sneakers in a prison courtyard.

Francis told the 700 or so inmates gathered outside the prison's new chapel that they cannot undo the past. But he said they must believe that things can change, and that they have the possibility of "writing a new story and moving forward."

"You have known the power of sorrow and sin and have not forgotten that within your reach is the power of the resurrection, the power of divine mercy which makes all things new."

He urged the inmates to use their experience in prison for good, to help end the cycle of violence. "The one who has suffered the greatest pain, and we could say has experienced hell, can become a prophet in society," he said. "Work so that this society, which uses people and discards them, will not go on claiming victims."

Can we create a society with open hearts, that heals the wounds of victims? That is mercy in action!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor