

PEACE and JUSTICE

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SPOTLIGHT ON Immigration and Christmastime

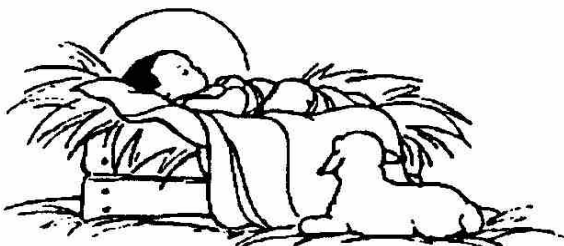
Welcoming Foreigners

Reflection by Joel Francia

So foreigners are cool. We have accents, we communicate differently, we are associated to some false but funny stereotypes and we do have awkward tendencies because frankly we just don't know everything. It is fun to be able to use the "I am a foreigner" card in certain situations. You are eligible to claim cultural misunderstanding as the root cause of a problem. And the catch is that it actually works because who is to dispute that a misconception did not take place. But this is not to say that we are invincible and have somehow concocted a magic pill to eternal coolness. The truth of the matter is foreigners can be overwhelmed too with the challenges of clashing cultures, homesickness, and difficulty in making true friends. It is very easy for someone to just go insane because of these various pressures even when someone tries to assimilate, even for a little bit.

To understand the context of such scenario, place yourself in the shoes of a foreigner. How is it like to be in a different country, city or school? What were the problems you dealt with? Were there "clicks"? Did you feel like an outcast? What was the turning point for you? What finally allowed you to be a part of the community?

I bet the turning point for most of you is when someone expressed a warm welcome to you and showed a genuine concern for your well being. I remember when I first got here in the States in 2004 how surreal it felt to actually be in the land of Uncle Sam. My mind was constantly translating sentences and slangs in Filipino. They did not make any sense at all. I was very excited and also very nervous of how I was going to fit in the American way of life. It was only half an hour when I got into my family's house in Lancaster that I received a call from my American nana. I answered the phone, "Hee-lo!" And with that, my nana was able to carry a five minute conversation. But before we hanged up, I remember her saying, "Joel, welcome to the US! I am glad you are here. And you can call me nana." From that point on, I realized how loved and welcomed I was in my new home. Unfortunately, not all foreigners receive the same kind of affection. So my short message to you for this Christmas season is to simply be welcoming to the "foreigners" around you. They may not necessarily be from another country because the person sitting next to you or living at the end of your floor may technically qualify as a foreigner. Jesus reminds us through His birth of how the Father welcomed us back into His kingdom. My prayer is that as we freely receive such love that we may also freely give it to those around us, whether they may be a foreigner or not.



A Place to Stay

Reflection by Mary Mietlicki

During the holiday season, many of us are busy thinking about our Christmas lists, spending time with family and friends over vacation, and having a whole month with no schoolwork. However, we may need to take a step back and look at the real reason we celebrate this holiday – the birth of Christ. We all know that Jesus was born in a manger, but there is another part to the Christmas story. Jesus was born in that manger because none of the inns had room for his family. Mary and Joseph were lucky to stumble upon that stable. That one innkeeper may not have had room inside his inn, but the spirit of generosity was alive when he offered Mary and Joseph a lowly stable for them to spend the night in.

Today, many people are faced with the same search for a place to stay that the holy family was faced with on the first Christmas. Many immigrants and refugees are left without a home. They are searching for a place to call home, especially during this time of year when families are ordinarily sharing time together. We must all remember the spirit of generosity that the innkeeper possessed. All humans, immigrants or not, deserve a home during the holidays. Mary and Joseph were searching for a place to stay and found it in the welcoming arms of a helpful man. It is our duty as Christians to open our arms to all who are searching for a place to stay and show these people the gift of God's kindness.

No Great Things

A reflection by Josephine Ossei-Anto

'Tis the season to give, the season to live, and the season to love. In my opinion, Christmas would not be the wonderful holiday it is today without the warm, welcoming feelings we experience from the community and neighbors around us. We must be willing to put our troubles away and welcome those around the world who are in need. In today's trying times, it has become our duty to take the extra steps to care for the poor and marginalized in society. Just as Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus were cared for by the strangers in Bethlehem, we too must care for the *visitors* of our world today. These visitors – immigrants – have become the most marginalized, forgotten, and overlooked in our society today, and are often denied humanity's basic rights of freedom, comfort, and a home. Laws have been made to restrict their lifestyles, deny their travels, and even constrain their cries for help and safety. As the Christmas season quickly approaches, I challenge us all to take a deeper look into our own lives, and reassess what we can do to help end this plight within our world. We must take the time to welcome those in need, help those who are struggling, and provide safety and warm shelter to those seeking protection. As an immigrant myself, I can honestly say my family and I would not be where we are without the generosity we have received over the years from the community around us. Everything we have been given has truly been a blessing from God, and has helped me understand the true importance of charitable giving and goodwill. With this in mind, this Christmas season, we too must make a change in our own lives and take the time to better our communities. So I encourage you all... take an Angel from the Campus Ministry Donation Tree, contribute to the Salvation Army, and become educated on both the legal and social issues surrounding immigration and the poverty that surrounds our nation today. For as Mother Teresa stated, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."

"Reason for the Season"

Reflection by Megan Brenner

Well, it's time to drag out the garland for the front porch and pull out your address books for the Christmas Cards that **MUST** be sent out. Lists are made for groceries needed, gifts to be bought, and errands to run before the big day. Amid all this chaos, often we forget about the true meaning of Christmas. After all, it is the birth of our Lord Jesus. It also can be seen as recognition of the wanderer, the immigrant. Jesus was a migrant, as were his parents. Mary and Joseph made that long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the home of Joseph's people. When Mary's time to give birth arrived, they could not find room anywhere and ended spending the evening in a stable with the animals, instead of a comfortable and clean bedroom. After Jesus' birth, the family was forced to flee to Egypt, to escape the wrath of King Herod, who was looking for the Son of God. Jesus was the great wanderer, a true migrant, from the beginning. Take a few moments to think about the possibility of having no home of your own, leaving all know you and love behind you, in order to look for the possibility of a better life. That is what the migrants are doing now. The refugees, the asylum seekers, the migrants workers, they are all the same. They pray for freedom, for stability, for comfort, not just for themselves but for their loved ones. Take a moment this season to think about the millions of displaced people in this world and their families. Pray for them and make strides to help them find a home.

For I was a stranger and you welcomed me...

Reflection by Dylan Menguy

During the Christmas season, it is often difficult to keep from being engulfed by our society's consumer-oriented messages with which we are bombarded. Between the post-Thanksgiving "black Friday" spending hype and the countless holiday-themed commercials on TV reminding us of the capitalist agendas of major corporations, it is almost impossible to see the true spirit of Christmas in daily American life. We constantly hear people talking about how our society has lost sight of the "true meaning of Christmas." But what *exactly* is the real meaning of this blessed season? Theologians will tell you that it is a time to celebrate the mystery of the incarnation. But what does that mean to us? How does this affect us as ordinary people? For me, Christmas is the ideal time to "welcome the stranger." We heard in the Gospel reading several weeks ago, taken from Matthew 25:31-46, the words of Christ telling us "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...for I was a stranger and *you* welcomed *me*." This idea of welcoming Christ goes beyond the Gospel and into our everyday lives. When was the last time when you saw someone who needed welcoming? Maybe all they needed was a warm smile or a hug. When we express good Christian hospitality, we are doing more than just being a nice person. We are indeed doing homage to the real presence of Christ found in every single human person. There exists with each of us the light of Christ, a light which has the power to dispel darkness. When we "welcome the stranger," just as the innkeeper welcomed Mary and Joseph, we welcome the light of Christ into our own lives. And, in doing this, we recognize the light of Christ in others. Christmas is an especially fitting time to do this. So, next time you feel overwhelmed by Christmas shopping and holiday preparations, just think of someone who could use a little extra love. Also, say a quick prayer for all the strangers in our world—the marginalized, the outcasts, the poor, and the immigrants. I guarantee you that once you show them a warm welcome, you will be filled with the *true* spirit of Christmas, and that is something which no amount of spending or gift-giving can replace.