

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Office for Human Dignity & Solidarity—Immigration Ministry

SESSION FOUR

What Rights and Duties Does Our Identity as Children of God Involve?



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Special acknowledgement to the Pastoral Migratoria lay leaders throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago

Printer: Excel Graphics & Forms, Des Plaines, IL

© 2012, Original Spanish language, Archdiocese of Chicago's Office of Human Dignity & Solidarity—Immigration Ministry (formerly Office of Immigrant Affairs and Immigrant Education)

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Printing number

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



PART ONE

Introduction

Introduction and Greetings

In this session we will study, reflect and speak about rights and responsibilities of citizens, both native born and immigrant.

Initial Prayer

Lord, we have seen ourselves in your mirror and see your image in us. Now you call us to action to serve your people. We cannot just stay in the brilliance of your image, as wonderful and joyful as it is. We need to take that light to the whole world, so the whole of creation and every human being may be able to reflect your clean and spotless image. May your face shine upon all of us, may it illumine all the pathways of your immigrant people so that we can all walk with confidence on your paths. We ask you this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Readings from the Word of God

The LORD will establish you as a holy people, as he swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD, your God, and walk in his ways. All the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the LORD is proclaimed over you, and they will be afraid of you. The LORD will generously increase the fruit of your womb, the offspring of your livestock, and the produce of your soil, upon the land which the LORD swore to your ancestors he would give you.

The LORD will open up for you his rich storehouse, the heavens, to give your land rain in due season and to bless all the works of your hands. You will lend to many nations but borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head not the tail, the top not the bottom, if you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am giving you today, observing them carefully, not turning aside, either to the right or to the left, from any of the words which I am giving you today, following other gods and serving them..—**DEUTERONOMY 28:9–14**

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

—**JAMES 1:22–27**

Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way.”—**MATTHEW 15:32**

Commentary

As we learned in the last session, God gives us a great dignity as human beings which brings with it rights and responsibilities. Later we will return to these readings to see how they shed light on our lives and show us the way.

PART TWO

Listening

From Everyday Life: Things that Happen

When Evaristo arrived in the U.S. he was undocumented and had nothing. He was very young and joined a group of friends who worked on construction. Some of them started getting into drugs and alcohol, but Evaristo stayed focused on what he wanted for himself and for his family. He claims it was a special force from God that kept him on the right path, although at the time he was not a fervent Catholic. With much effort, he managed to move forward: he learned English on his own; obtained his legal residency; strove to improve his education and obtained a job as a labor union representative. Later, he had a powerful experience of God.

He saw the image of God in himself and decided from that moment that whatever he would do would be to defend the rights of workers. He committed himself to fight



against the injustices he still saw around him and to dedicate his life to speak for those who did not dare to speak for themselves, and to encourage those who do not speak up to find their voice.

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

How does fear prevent us from fighting for our rights? Do you know of cases where people struggled for their rights and were successful? What about ourselves, do we fear our own failure and incapacity? At what point have we felt overwhelmed? Do we fully know our rights and responsibilities?

From Everyday Life: Things that Happen

There are reports indicating that many Americans do not understand the most important of rights and duties concerning *all* residents, including documented and undocumented immigrants.

For example, the Migration Policy Institute, a center of migration studies, indicates several areas where the integration of immigrants into civic life would be very effective. These policy areas coincide with our basic human rights. The reports identify topics of integration that touch on a great variety of federal, state and local resources such as:

- Basic adult education, adult literacy and English as a Second Language
- Undergraduate and graduate studies
- Work training and development
- Eligibility for health insurance and financing
- Local and state immigration laws
- Infant and early childhood education
- Elementary and secondary education

Governments and communities have many programs and tools at their disposal in order to respond to the challenges of integration in these areas.

The policies and programs to help integrate undocumented immigrants must also be connected to possible legalization measures. The integration of those who obtain permanent residence and try to be integrated into American life and society—particularly the labor force and civic institutions—must be the main objective of these efforts (Migration Policy Institute, *Executive Action on Immigration*, p. 8).

While the DREAM Act was not approved at the federal level, in some states there has been legislation in this area so that undocumented young people may attend college freely and may have access to grants and scholarships. Although these measures do not fully solve the problem of citizenship pathway that the DREAM Act would have opened at the federal level, at least this is a significant step.

There are other areas, such as housing and work, that still need much attention and care.

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

Where do you see the rights of immigrants being advanced? What areas still need more work? What responsibilities go hand in hand with each of the rights: education, work, housing, health...? Is there something we can do? Do we know the laws, rules and rights we can claim? Do you discuss, share and communicate these rights to others?

PART THREE

Learning

Now let us look at how Scripture, the Church and current theological reflection speak to us about these topics, in order to be able to reflect on our own attitudes and actions.

Enlightened by the Word

Let us read the initial Bible passages Deuteronomy. 28:9-14; James 1:22-27; and Matthew again.

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

What words or phrases strike you most? How is my own life similar to the readings? How do I understand the blessings of the Lord in Deuteronomy? How does the passage from James help me think? How does the attitude of Jesus toward his followers challenge me in my own life? Do we sometimes feel that we “do not” have or we “cannot”? In other words, are we living in a mindset of scarcity? How do we experience daily the incredible abundance of God’s blessings? What calls or challenges do I feel as I read these passages? How do my daily actions respond to these calls of Scripture? How do I see the different groups with whom I relate respond to this? What pathways of conversion are opened to me through these passages?

Understanding the Passages

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-14 The destiny of Israel is defined and assured only if it listens and obeys the Word of the Lord and faithfully maintains its commitment to be the chosen and protected people of God. As we can see, the concept of blessing is intimately related to the aspirations of economic, social, and family well-being. Israel knows by experience that as long as it was close to the design of God, bread was not scarce. Yet Israel also knows this changed when selfishness and greed appeared, resulting in the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few to the impoverishment of the many.

JAMES 1:22-27 The gospel must be efficacious in daily life. Mere intellectual acceptance of the divine word is not enough to please God. What is really valuable is not a simple knowledge of the good, but its being carried out. Otherwise, James says, it would be like a person who looks at themselves in the mirror in order to know who they are. But what they see is purely external. That knowledge is useless, because it does not translate into a coherent behavior. The perfect law of freedom does not enslave: it makes us free. Authentic religiosity, takes into account orphans and widows, and manifests a desire to look after the most vulnerable, people deprived of their own rights. It does not include a mention of ritual practices and such omission is a proof of the priority that James sees in the social dimension.

MATTHEW 15:32 All have been called to sit down and participate in the Messianic banquet, symbolized in the abundance of the bread offered and shared.

Enlightened by the Doctrine of the Church

The defense of human rights is not an invention of the United Nations, although the efforts of this organization can be celebrated and supported. From a theological and spiritual perspective, the Church defends human rights from days of old. The defense of human rights is an essential part of Catholic Social Teaching.

Human beings have basic rights and responsibilities derived from their human dignity that is reflected in the fact that they were created after the image and likeness of God. Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes that human beings have a right to life and to the fulfillment of basic needs allowing for a decent and dignified life: food, housing, health care, education and work. We are called to respect the rights of others and to seek the common good. (*Series Faith and Human Development: Biblical Guide*, USCCB, Washington DC, 1998).

The Gospel calls Christians to give priority to the need of the most vulnerable. A moral test of society is how it treats its members in need. Wherever there are unjust structures, Christians are called to oppose them. Those who are most in need require the most accurate answers. (*Series Faith and Human Development: Biblical Guide*, USCCB, Washington, DC, 1998).

In the Light of Contemporary Theological Reflection

by Roger Cardinal Mahony, former Archbishop of Los Angeles

Immigration is a moral issue because it has an impact on human rights, human dignity, and the life of the person. The way in which we respond speaks directly of our moral character as free persons, as Americans...there are many people who say that immigrants are hurting our economy. I believe there are many factors that deny such statements. But first of all, what do we mean by economy? My opinion is that economy is not shaped by the ordinary concept of this term. Economy has its root in the Greek term Oikonomia, which means the order of a house. The focus is not

monetary. Oikonomia suggests the way in which a home is ordered and administered. In Christian history, oikonomia refers to the way in which the house of God is administered.

The home of God, the great economy of God is where holiness and truth, justice and love, and above all, peace, prevail. In my opinion, what defines an economy as good is the flourishing of all those who are part of the economy, the home or the community of God. And the question is, who owns the home? Does the good home of God have enough room for all?

If we take into account the root of the word economy and the Scripture themes of hospitality and welcoming, the focus of everything shifts to consider whether those who work and their families are receiving the benefits of their work. In Catholic thinking, a person should not serve the economy, but economy should serve the person so that each person and their family can live with dignity and without need.

This means that we need to reform our immigration system in order to provide legal protection to all those who live in the margins of our economy and are not invited to participate in the banquet: the undocumented and future immigrants who come to our nation to work, to rejoin their families or to support their families back in their homelands...Any law that does not serve justice violates basic human dignity and human rights. Our constitution was written in order to avoid unfair laws imposed by a malevolent monarch. (Roger Cardinal Mahony, *For Goodness Sake: Why America Needs Immigration Reform*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2011).

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

Which of these expressions resonate with me? How do they affirm what I already believe? What more is needed in our world so that these principles are respected?

PART FOUR

Proclaiming

Leadership

Human rights cannot defend themselves on their own. There have to be leaders, coordinators and activists who advocate for human rights and world peace. Within the Church there are many groups devoted to various areas of human rights. Latino leaders can approach this task using various strategies. In the following passages, Tim Matovina, professor at Notre Dame University, and Fr. Allan Deck, SJ, give us some key insights about the attitudes of leaders who work on behalf of their community.

- Representation and equality. Latino struggles typically involve struggles for equal treatment and representation in civic and ecclesial bodies. In public life, this includes issues such as desegregation, affirmative action, bilingual education, the rights of workers and immigration reform.

Several strategies have been followed:

- Resistance to conquest
- Search for representation and equality. Asking for a greater cultural sensitivity from all structures. Demand of greater representation at decision making tables, in the civic and ecclesial levels. To integrate the elements of the Latino-Catholic American citizenship into one identity.
- Demand for radical policy changes

These strategies are not exclusive. Although the second one asking for equalitarian treatment and representation is the most common, many ministers and Hispanic organizations have combined this strategy with elements of the first and third. We need grace and discernment to decide which one is the best adapted to reality and the situation. But this gives us inspiration and hope to be servants and prophets and to accompany our brothers and sisters. (Extracted from Tim Matovina, *Latino/a Strategies for promoting change in church and society: an historical overview*, NCCCHM, *Leadership in Church and Society*).

A Changing Leadership

Those of us who are in positions of leadership in the field of Hispanic Ministry must also recognize the generational changes taking place. Today our leadership is composed of four generations, each one with its own experience of Church and of levels of commitment in the processes of the last 60 years. These generations sometimes are defined in the following way: 1) Pre-Vatican II; 2) Vatican II; 3) Generation X; 4) Millennials. It is interesting to note that almost half of our Hispanic Catholics were born in Latin America and share the life of generations formed outside of the United States. So the characterizations based on the experience of the United States perhaps are not as accurate as some people think. Latinos participate in these generations of the United States in their own way. The issue, however, is that Hispanic Ministry should continue to respect the reality of diversity in terms of generation as well as in terms of nationality, social class, level of integration, and language capacity. (Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ, *El Momento Hispano*).

FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

What approach has been used in the struggle for human rights in your own experience?
 What strategies do you think would work best in your own context? Identify elements that could bring about a change.

PART FIVE

Final Prayer

Lord, help us to know ourselves deeply, as you know us. Give us light to see ourselves in your mirror, not only in our exterior, but in our deepest identity as your children. And if we are children, we are also brothers and sisters to each other. Make us children faithful to your will and generous in our service. Help us know the blessing of freedom, so abundantly given to us as your disciples. Being your children gives us dignity and rights in the world. But it also implies a great responsibility to follow your will in our profession, in our communities, in our world. May we, without fear, keep your presence among us; may we nourish our people with the abundance that you yourself give us. Amen.

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