Cardinal Mahony on immigration: Remember Matthew 25

BY R.W. DELLINGER
Staff Writer

In his wide-ranging “Surprise: We All Employ Undocumented Workers” March 24 statement, Cardinal Roger Mahony stressed how “all of us as disciples of the Lord are really called by Jesus to look at the strangers in our midst as looking at the face of Jesus.”

As proof of this sacred mandate, he said one thing: go no farther than Matthew 25:35: “For I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Since retiring as archbishop of Los Angeles last year, Cardinal Mahony has devoted himself to advancing the cause of comprehensive immigration reform in the nation. Specifically, he has headed an effort to organize Catholic college students around the biblical and moral principles that are the foundation for the church’s ongoing support for immigration reform. Moreover, he’s brought together college presidents, urging them to take up the cause of their immigrant “dreamer” students.

The cardinal noted how Adam and Eve were actually the first immigrants and migrants in human history: how Moses led his imprisoned Jewish people out of Egypt to the Promised Land; and how Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to protect the life of their newborn son.

During his Power Point presentation, Cardinal Mahony also went through the recent historical waves of immigrants to the U.S., from the pilgrims in 1620 fleeing religious persecution to today’s Hispanics seeking a better economic life. In addition, he spoke about the different backlash movements against immigrants, starting with the Know Nothing Party of the 1850’s up to today’s border-guarding militarism.

“The so-called ‘flood of immigrants’ has always alarmed some native-born Americans,” he said. “Some feared job competition from foreigners. Others disliked the religion or politics of the newcomers. Has anyone heard that recently? We’re still hearing the same thing today.”

“Ten Cardinal Mahony asked the provocative question: ‘So where did the last fourth wave of immigrants go wrong?’

“Well, simply as a nation we sent two clear messages at the same time: ‘no trespassing’ and ‘help wanted,’ ‘no, we don’t want you here’ and ‘yes, we need you,’” he explained. “So it’s really a big problem now and especially for the future. And this is the part that a lot of people don’t get. Guess what? Beginning Jan. 1, 2011, until 2030, 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 every day. That’s happening for 19 years to come.

“Hello, Something’s going to go wrong here, and you know why? Because baby boomers are having 40 percent fewer children. So there isn’t a replacement workforce for them. And, secondly, who’s going to take care of them?”

The answer to these demographic quandaries is obvious, observed the cardinal. Immigrants will be needed to fill the growing void in skilled as well as unskilled labor. And the church — as it has so many times in the past — has a vital role to play in helping these newcomers assimilate into their new nation.

“So as disciples of Jesus Christ, though we are a people of hope, we don’t rely on the guys in Congress,” Cardinal Mahony said. “We go forward as hope-filled people, trusting in God’s providence for the family of God. We need to end polarization, embracing the new opportunities across generations and groups.

“And I think we in the church have a great opportunity to be a civil voice in this discussion,” he added. “We don’t yell and scream and use all these generalities: ‘Those illegals’… It’s really important for us to take that role seriously. So we come back to where we started: ‘For I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’”

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reach out to others and “bring them to the Teacher” for “God’s honor and glory.”

“Acercar los hombres y mujeres de nuestro tiempo a Dios (bring men and women of our time closer to God); that is the essence of catechesis, the essence of evangelization,” he said, referring to the day’s Cycle A Gospel reading from John when Martha — based on her faith in the resurrection of her brother Lazarus — reaches out to her sister Mary telling her, “the Teacher is here and is asking for you.”

The Gospel was dramatically re-enacted by two lay readers, Dionne Grillo and Douglas Leal, from the Office of Religious Education, and Deacon David Estrada, executive director of the archdiocesan Synod Implementation and Stewardship Office.

“Our task is to bring others to the Teacher,” Archbishop Gomez said to a packed arena, mostly parish ministers throughout Southern California who waited for the liturgy despite the heavy mid-afternoon rain in Orange County.


“Bring them to the encounter with Jesus Christ so that they realize he is here, that he is alive and present in our world and in our lives,” Archbishop Gomez remarked. “Our task is to help others to hear the call of Jesus to them, that he wants them to follow him.”

“Be Jesus’ voice, help our brothers and sisters to hear His Voice, Voice infusing life, Voz que infunde vida,” he said, reiterating Congressional theme.

“Time is flying. Let us make use of the fleeting moments. They will never return,” he said, citing Mother Marianne Cope of Molokai, a Franciscan Sister who migrated from Germany to upstate New York and served lepers in Hawaii for 35 years after responding to a letter sent to her by Hawaiian authorities seeking religious sisters to care for patients in their leper colony.

“Isn’t that just the way that sometimes we hear Jesus’ voice?” Archbishop Gomez asked the assembly. “A normal letter, or through an encounter, or a conversation. And that’s how Mother Marianne read this letter, as the voice of Jesus calling her.”

Archbishop Gomez encouraged participants to help others come out of their self-made “prisons” such as selfishness, brokenness and sinfulness, into the “new light of the resurrection!”

He described catechesis as more than a job, but a “part of God’s plan of redeeming love.”

“Catechesis is at the heart of the Church’s mission” of proclaiming His salvation until the end of time, the archbishop said.

He urged the faithful to renew their faith every day by “always having that intimate friendship with Jesus.”

The nearly three-hour Mass ended with a standing ovation for Religious Sister of Charity Edith Prendergast, who minutes before had welcomed me. “Hello! Something’s going to go wrong here, and you know why? Because baby boomers are having 40 percent fewer children. So there isn’t a replacement workforce for them. And, secondly, who’s going to take care of them?”

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Contributing to this story were Paula Doyle, Doris Benavides, Elisabeth Defrere and R.W. Dellinger. For more photos, see page 20. For more information about Congress (in 2013, Feb. 22-24), go to www.congress.org.

To our readers:

This week’s (March 30) issue does not include a Regional News section, because of coverage of the Religious Education Congress and Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Mexico and Cuba. Regional News Sections (San Gabriel) will resume in the double-dated issue of April 6-13.

Next week’s issue will include extended Calendar and Liturgical Calendar listings. The Tidings will resume weekly publication on April 20, and its offices will be closed April 6.

The Tidings has opened a new email address for the Calendar of Events section: nős-tidings.com. Items may still be mailed or faxed (see page 18 for details). TD

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