

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 morning session, 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 had to 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 sup-

port 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 recorded history; how Moses led his imprisoned Jewish people out of Egypt to the Promise 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 major historical waves of immigrants to the U.S., from the pilgrims in England 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 1850s up to today’s border-guarding militiamen.

“The so-called ‘flood of immigrants’ has always alarmed some native-born Ameri-

cans,” 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.”

Then 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 that’s created a big, 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 to 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.’” **TD**

CONGRESS

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

“*Acercar a 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, Dione 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.

Concelebrants included Archbishop Emeritus Cardinal Roger Mahony, Auxiliary Bishops Joseph Sartoris, Oscar Solis, Alexander Salazar, Edward Clark and Gerald Wilkerson, and Msgr. James Loughnane, Episcopal Vicar of the San Gabriel Region.

“[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 so that they understand that he is asking for 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 Congress’ 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 seek-

ing religious sisters to care for patients in their leper colony.

“Isn’t that just that the way that sometimes we hear Jesus’s 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 asked the assembly to recognize the work of the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education’s team as well as the more than 400 volunteers that were involved for nearly 12 months in the yearly event’s organization.

The assembly also applauded the 200-plus voice choir and orchestra led by John Flaherty; the liturgical dancing companies that have been participating in the event for two decades; Archbishop Gomez and Bishop Clark, each celebrating the 10th anniversary of their ordination as bishops; and Cardinal Mahony, celebrating 50 years of priesthood this year.

‘40,000 can’t be wrong’

“I get so filled [in Congress],” said Martha Vazquez, a catechist at St. Mary Church in Bakersfield, attending Congress for the fifth time. “This time I want to learn to recognize God’s voice more clearly in my life; make sure it’s His voice.”

Vazquez also appreciated “what Sister Edith said [during the opening remarks], citing Luisa May Alcott, ‘not to be afraid of storms and learn to sail my ship.’

“I will text this to my boss who was recently diagnosed with cancer,” she said with watery eyes, while picking up her cell phone. “This is

what Congress is about: it helps us to guide others as well. It’s not only about my own ship.”

“We want to learn to listen to His voice among other voices,” said Tom Miller, from St. James Church in Redondo Beach, who was attending Congress for the first time together with his wife Jeanne.

“Forty thousand people can’t be wrong,” they both said when asked why they had decided to attend this year. “We’re here to renew our faith.” The members of JustFaith ministries said they were particularly interested in all the arena events and in Father Greg Boyle’s presentation on his social justice work with at-risk youth.

“I’m interested in seeing how he (Archbishop Gomez) interacts with kids” in the live chat, said Kim Tuverson, technology coordinator at St. Monica School who has attended Congress “off and on” since 1976.

During the 45-minute online chat March 23 with St. Dorothy seventh and eighth graders which was sprinkled with [happy face] emoticons throughout the text, students were particularly interested in learning about the archbishop’s vocation and his family support.

“Were you very religious as a child?” asked Giovanna M.

“Why did you want to become an archbishop?” asked Jackson H.

“Do you feel God is present with you at all times?” asked Kennedy B.

“Were you born Catholic?” asked Lauren C. “If you could become a pope, would you?” questioned Joe K.

“How did your family respond to your decision to become a priest?” asked Jasmine A.

In a few lines, the archbishop encouraged the students to learn more about the history of the Catholic Church, about the new American Saints Kateri Tekakwitha and Maryanne Cope, and to appreciate their Catholic education.

Personal questions such as the archbishop’s birthday and his favorite movie and sport were also part of the conversation.

“I came to learn more stuff and to become a better person,” said Hector Quintero, attending for the first time with Presentation of Mary’s youth group.

“It provides a good opportunity to befriend others and to help youth get involved in

church,” said his peer Miguel Hernandez.

Speaking to The Tidings in front of the Diocese of San Bernardino exhibit booth, San Bernardino Bishop Gerald Barnes, who has attended Congress for 16 years, shared why he comes every year to mingle with attendees.

“Basically I’m here to affirm and thank people for their ministries — have them think beyond,” said the bishop. “I think this is the group that’s committed and dedicated; they carry the burdens and now it’s kind of like their way to be refreshed and do some thinking.

“I heard a lot this year, which I was hoping would happen, that people get together when they get back and they process or evaluate what they’ve learned,” added Bishop Barnes. “It just isn’t an experience they had; it’s an experience that’s reflected, and that’s good for me to hear that. I want to thank the archdiocese for sponsoring this and allowing others to come in and, not only to learn, but to share our own experiences.” **TD**

Contributing to this story were Paula Doyle, Doris Benavides, Elisabeth Deffner and R.W. Dellinger. For more photos, see page 20. For more information about Congress (in 2013, Feb. 22-24), go to ww.recongress.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: calendar@the-tidings.com. Items may still be mailed or faxed (see page 18 for details). **TD**