

## ***Behind statistics of deported aliens are tales of human suffering***

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### **Body**

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It is with profound sadness that I write this letter as a response to the recent **deportation** of 23 of our Mexican brothers and sisters. So often the hysterical rhetoric regarding the immigration issue overshadows the **human** tragedy of immigration. We hear **statistics** rather than stories, stories of lives mired in **human suffering**.

Recently, a number of Mexican immigrants were arrested as they began their workday at a laundry in Clearwater. One of the local papers stated that 23 alleged illegal **aliens** were picked up during a morning raid. What the paper neglected to mention were the **human** stories **behind** that statistic. During the raid, wives were separated from husbands and children from their mothers. The stability and integrity of families were torn asunder.

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In one instance, a young mother was separated from her 11-month-old child. The mother never received the opportunity to contact her family or check on her infant. One can only imagine the extent of her pain.

Consider also the plight of a young wife forced to abandon her husband who **suffers** from rheumatic heart disease. The husband frantically called the local church in order to find his wife, who, knowing that she is her husband's sole health provider, remained in jail unable to contact her husband.

I mention only two of the 23 stories of **human suffering** which reflect the growing tragedy of the immigration issue. Our common dignity as **human** beings calls us to respect the **alien** among us, regardless of their status or social position. A preferential love for the poor and disenfranchised is a sure sign of one's Christian identity.

In this spirit I must condemn the inhumane treatment of these brothers and sisters in Christ. The fact that these deportees were not allowed to contact their families or retrieve any of their belongings is particularly reprehensible. Within 24 hours of their arrest, they were returned to Mexico with only the clothes on their backs and released into a remote area without food, water or the financial means to return to their towns.

While I respect our nation's right to control its own borders, I also recognize the right of each **human** person trapped in a system of injustice, massive poverty and oppression to seek relief from such an inhumane situation. Crushing poverty and lack of educational and employment opportunities have led many to seek a better life for their families here in the United States.

I appreciate that this is a particularly thorny issue, especially in an election year, yet we must not forget our duty to respect and uphold the dignity of each and every **human** being. Our immigrants should not be used as pawns in the political arena. Recent immigration legislation has been particularly deplorable since it makes it practically impossible for any immigrant to legally enter the country. Such restrictive immigration legislation is quite shameful and thoroughly contrary to our tradition in this country: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . . Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me." Our great national tradition as well as our Judeo-Christian heritage oblige us to treat all with love and compassion. We must be a sanctuary of

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hope and light to those who are in our midst. Regardless of one's legal status, each person must be afforded **human** dignity and respect.

As a sacrament of unity, the church is not foreign to anyone nor is anyone a stranger in the church. The **human** person, particularly if he is weak, defenseless or driven to the margins of society, is a sacrament of Christ's presence. Jesus asks us to recognize him in the "stranger" among us (Matthew 25:35). For the Christian, such recognition and hospitality is fidelity to one's identity as a follower of Christ.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of Americas and Mother of us all, protect us and help us to be loving and compassionate as we strive to give glory to her Son.

Most Rev. Robert N. Lynch, bishop,

Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg

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