

Secure communities, secure families, secure church

By Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski

As I returned from the papal consistory in Rome a few weeks ago, I sat next to Monsignor Donald Sakano, the pastor of the Basilica of Old St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. He spoke of the ministry to the people of the neighborhood and the physical plant needs that he and his community were addressing. One of the needs was the high brick wall that was built to protect the church and her members during the attacks of the Know-Nothing Party of the mid-1800s. The wall is a stark reminder of the days when people were attacked simply because they came to our country to make a better life for themselves and their families. Over the years that wall protected the Irish, German, Italian and African immigrants who sought refuge in the church.

Clearly, the topic of immigration has generated many deep feelings in our region and various places throughout the United States. Some state that the church should not have any place in speaking of immigration and the status of immigrants. But if the church remained silent, we would not be faithful to the mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to us as his people. From the Gospels, we know that Jesus preached of the basic human dignity of each person. Whether encountering a sinner, a leper, a rich young man or a Samaritan woman, Jesus treated each one with respect. When we gather on Holy Thursday, we recall the washing of the disciples' feet at the Last Supper as well as the words of Jesus after he gave us his own body and blood, "Do this in memory of me." This command refers to the Eucharist as well as the mission to which Jesus gave to his church.

Over these past years, the church has consistently upheld the dignity of the human person created in the image of God. Our clear voice in response to the clear threat to human dignity caused by abortion, the death penalty, and euthanasia has not weakened or been silenced by legislative agendas or popular opinions. Whenever the

church sees the image of God being marred, we are obligated to speak out.

While the Secure Communities program attempts to address part of the concerns of our country's broken immigration system, it does so at the expense of human dignity and the well-being of the family. Even those in local law enforcement worry about their ability to protect communities because of the lack of trust created by their enforcement of the Secure Communities program. The church firmly believes in the right of government to control and protect its borders; however, the human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected. We have much to contribute to the United States by applying the Gospel message as we seek to better the lives of all our people.

The wall that surrounds Old St. Patrick Cathedral in New York City, please God, is not necessary today. But I pray that the wall does not symbolize that our Catholic faith is now kept within the confines of a building rather than being lived and proclaimed in the freedom that Jesus calls us to live.

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