Novena for Migrants to Our Lady of Guadalupe

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First Edition

Migration: A Sign of the Times

We live in an age of mass migration. Hundreds of millions of people live outside their countries of birth, with tens of millions leaving because, for one or more reasons, they feel they have to do so. Many of those forced to migrate would qualify as refugees: individuals forced to flee their homelands because of persecution or fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Still millions of others, who would not qualify as refugees, migrate for complicated and often overlapping reasons, including severe economic trouble, environmental degradation, or the desire to reunite with family.

Regardless of why people migrate or the challenges they face along the way, Catholics are called to recognize the inherent dignity of all persons. We are called to better understand and respond to the complex pastoral, political, and economic

causes that drive migration. We are asked to carefully consider how we treat migrants who live in our communities, who attend our parishes, and frequent our local establishments.

As bishop of the Diocese of Austin, I have had the opportunity to engage migrant communities throughout my diocese and witness firsthand the vitality they bring to the local community. I have also heard heartbreaking stories as many of the Catholic faithful have relayed to me their experiences of violence and displacement from their homelands, of the dangers on their journey, and their difficulties following their arrival in the United States. These encounters have reinforced my conviction of the important role that Catholics can play in responding and providing support to migrants living here.

Given the enormous scope of the migration issue today, we will assume as a backdrop one feature of this complex situation—the migration of persons from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We will focus on people from those four countries for two

reasons: First, for many of you praying this novena, migrants from those countries are the most visible signs of the phenomenon of migration to the United States. Recent debates that focus on the US-Mexico border point to the proximity of this situation and its politically fraught reality. Second, it is important from the perspective of our faith and, perhaps most notably, for the role that Our Lady of Guadalupe plays as the Patroness of the Americas. This novena will address some of the complicated realities associated with migration to the United States, with the hope that Mary will provide us the wisdom to more effectively deal with migrants across our southern border.

Who Is Our Lady of Guadalupe?

Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego as Our Lady of Guadalupe on three occasions in December 1531, speaking to him in his native Nahuatl tongue and asking him to deliver a message to Bishop Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Mary's message to Bishop Zumárraga was that she wanted a church built on the spot where she appeared. At first, the bishop

did not believe Juan Diego and later demanded a sign. Juan Diego went back to Tepeyac Hill and implored the Virgin Mary to provide such a sign. Mary instructed him to gather roses from the wintry hillside, an odd time of the year to do so. Juan Diego filled his *tilma* (cloak) with the roses and returned with them to the bishop. Upon opening his tilma, fresh roses fell to the ground and an imprint of our Lady's image was miraculously revealed on the tilma. A church was built on the site, and Juan Diego lived out his days nearby, helping others, praying, and doing penance.

Nearly 500 years later, people continue to pray to Our Lady of Guadalupe for her intercession to protect and guide them. Our Lady of Guadalupe has become important in the Americas. She is often lifted up as an advocate for migrants and other vulnerable populations. The Catholic faithful often turn to Our Lady of Guadalupe to ask for safe passage as they embark on their long migration journey. This novena provides you an opportunity to pray in solidarity with those who pray to her for that protection.



CHAD ZUBER/SHUTTERSTOCK

DAY 1

Why They Migrate: Violence

It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.

—LUKE 17:2

What are parents to do when they live in a community stricken by instability, violence, and crime? For years, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have had the unfortunate distinction of experiencing some of the highest homicide rates of any country in the world. Impunity for criminal behavior is common. Crimes against women are a particularly acute problem in these countries, as is widespread violence perpetrated by international criminal syndicates and local gangs.

Gangs often turn to extortion and other forms of criminal behavior to fund their illegal enterprises. Some forcibly recruit women and children into sexual slavery. Others force teenage boys to join

gangs and engage in illicit behavior. If the boys fail to comply, more harassment, persecution, and violence often ensues. Government agencies responsible for protecting citizens against these violent perpetrators are often corrupt, inept, or otherwise unwilling or unable to do so.

Families must often fend for themselves and thus are left with the difficult choice to either stay in an unsafe and unstable community or try to escape to a place—typically the United States—where they are often unwelcomed, rejected, and marginalized. Given the existential dangers at home, is it surprising that many mothers, fathers, and children decide to flee in search of safety in another land? Given similar circumstances, would you do anything different?

PRAYER ***Our Lady, protectress of immigrants and refugees…***

As you and your family fled from Herod in the face of threats of violence and persecution and became refugees in a foreign land, you know the fear of mothers and fathers who flee with their

own children in search of a place of safety. For all those who are afflicted by violence in their homes or in their neighborhoods, please intercede on their behalf and lead them to a safe haven.

Grant us the wisdom to respond effectively to the sufferings of those who flee violence. May we work to build a world of peace that shuns violence. Amen.

DAY 2

Why They Migrate: Poverty

If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?

—1 JOHN 3:17

Many of us know the anxiety that comes with economic insecurity like unforeseen job loss, an injury, an unexpected sickness that makes it impossible to work, or a downturn in the economy that results in widespread unemployment. When a job disappears, mortgages do not. Food still