

Lord God, help us to remember those who tonight will go to sleep unfed and unwelcome, strangers in foreign lands, people who have fled for their lives and are far from their homes.

We lift up to you those who are escaping persecution and conflict, such as the thousands from East Africa and the Middle East who have escaped death, torture or ruthless exploitation. So many carry wounds, mental and physical. So many have suffered so much.

Lord Jesus, give us more of your compassion for their plight, soften our hearts to their situation, and help us follow your lead in seeking justice and mercy on their behalf. And Lord, we pray for an end to the wars, poverty and human rights abuses that drive desperate people to become refugees in the first place.

We give thanks for the people who are working in these troubled countries, and ask for your blessing on them as they bring life, dignity and hope to those that remain.

We pray these things in the name of your son who was himself born into the troubled life of a refugee.

Amen

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Unfolding the Word



Notes: Matt 1:18-25; 2: 13-23

The Flight into Egypt (Matt 2:13-23)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem at a time when Herod was king of Judea (Jerusalem and its surrounding area). He was a ruthless ruler. He had killed some of his own family when he thought they were plotting to overthrow him – or might be plotting.

Of course, he was troubled when the Wise Men arrived saying a new king of the Jews had been born. He told them to find out more information and to come back to tell him – so that “I too can go and worship him.” Herod had no intention of worshipping any opponent! The Wise Men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod and went home to their own countries “by another route.”

Joseph was worried that their child would not be safe in Herod’s territory, so he took Mary and Jesus and fled into Egypt. They left their own country, lived in a foreign country but wanted to return. After Herod died, Joseph was still afraid to come home to Bethlehem as he feared Herod’s son (the new king). So, he went to live in Nazareth (at that time in a different ruler’s territory). Matthew is saying that, even from birth, Jesus was not welcomed by some people (e.g. Herod). This becomes very obvious when he starts his public ministry. The Gospels tell us of the Pharisees and the Sadducees opposing Jesus, and the High Priests and the Sanhedrin plotting to have him killed.

Sixty million people around the world have been forced to leave their own homes and become refugees because of war, persecution, genocide, etc... Many are forced to flee their homes because of their religion or their race (e.g. Muslims persecuting Christians, Hutus fighting Tutsis in Rwanda). They leave their own countries reluctantly – to bring their families (and themselves) to safer places where they can live in peace. Many of the refugees who come to Ireland have already been persecuted, wounded, had family members killed or unjustly imprisoned.

How do we welcome them to our country? Is the accommodation we offer Asylum Seekers and Refugees fair, helpful? Is the allowance we give them just, supportive? Why can’t they work? Is this discrimination?

Pope Francis welcomed Syrian families to live in the Vatican and asked that parishes around the world take in one family per parish. How have parishes responded?

Pope Francis said that the city, the town, the village that does not welcome the stranger has forgotten to care for itself. What does he mean?

Various ethnic groups could enrich our city with their talents/work-skills and heritage? Do we allow them enrich our lives or do we feel threatened by them?