

January 24, 2025  
St. Francis de Sales, Bishop & Doctor

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This morning as I celebrated Holy Mass the Psalm response proclaimed: “Kindness and truth shall meet.” It came upon the heels of yesterday’s Memorial observance for our diocesan native, St. Marianne Cope, OSF, where the Church prayed that we might “burn in love for God and for those who suffer” and called to mind how she was a pilgrim of hope to the outcast of her day. It was also used in the course of today’s Memorial of St. Francis de Sales, who in post-Reformation Geneva, Switzerland, in the midst of great division, was known as the “Gentle Christ of Geneva” and the “Gentleman Saint”; and whose Collect this morning read: “graciously grant that, following his example, we may always display the gentleness of your charity in the service of our neighbor.” I feel compelled in my role as a spiritual leader in our nation to address the impact of some recent pronouncements by our national leaders which appear in their tone and execution to diverge from the teachings of Christ and His Church.

This teaching mission comes from Christ himself through His Church to the successors of the apostles, the bishops who are charged with the handing on of the faith and to ensure that the Catholic faith is taught in its entirety.<sup>1</sup> Let me be clear from the start that there is nothing wrong with a spiritual leader seeking to remind their congregations that as “Christians” our belief centers on a God who is Love (1 Jn 4:8); and that “the tender compassion (mercy) of our God” (Lk 1:78) needs to be the hallmark of our discipleship as witnessed in Jesus Christ himself in his outreach to the outcasts. Many have been quick to weigh in on the words spoken by the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, DC, Mariann Budde at the Presidential Inaugural Prayer Service. Yes, they did catch my attention and for the right reason. They reminded me that the call to discipleship can never be set aside and that in every moment I need to remember the dignity and sanctity of the human person and that how we respond to a person in need, even if we have differences, is important.

It brought to mind a conversation my paternal grandmother had with me many years ago at a moment when I was being harsh in my speech regarding a difficult situation. I remember her looking me in the eye and saying to me these words, “One should not be so quick to judge unless you have walked a mile in that other person’s shoes.” Her lesson has not been lost on me. Moreover, I am conscious that I may not agree with everything a person thinks, says, or does but it does not give me the liberty (no matter who I am) to blatantly mock them or criticize their personal integrity or good name.

In fact, the whole purpose of the Synodal process that Pope Francis has called the Catholic Church to engage in is not about doctrine. Rather, it is about seeking to make us better listeners to one another, so that together we, as Church, might better witness to the Gospel message of Jesus

Christ and address the areas of Sin that continue to plague our planet. Conversion is a journey, not a done deal! However, you and I can make this journey in the knowledge that the Christ has come to redeem the entire human family! As we have been reflecting on over the course of the last few weeks: “She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21).

## Four Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine

Consequently, my drawing the faithful’s attention to Church teaching in a public forum is not a violation of the principle of the separation of Church and State; nor is it getting involved in politics. In fact, the separation of Church and State is meant to protect religious institutions from interference in the proclamation and living out of one’s beliefs. This tenet is enhanced in the Catholic Church by her social principles and the belief that political and societal issues should be evaluated based on the four principles of Catholic social doctrine: the common good, the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, and solidarity.<sup>ii</sup>

In referring to the common good and the formation of one’s conscience, the US Catholic Bishops Conference in reference to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The Common Good is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily (n. 1906).’ Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to life, a right to religious freedom, and a right to have access to those things required for human decency” (See *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2023).

In referring to human dignity, the bishops throughout their various moral statements and documents see this principle as the foundation of all social teaching. They state in their work on forming consciences, “We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person” (*Ibid*).

What then do we mean by subsidiarity? The Bishops of the United States teach that, “The principle of Subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society (such as the state or federal government) should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions (such as the family, local schools, or the Church community). Yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, or advance the common good. Subsidiarity reflects the essential freedom and innate human dignity of each person while also recognizing the role higher authorities, such as government, can play to ensure that all people are able to thrive” (*Ibid*). As Pope Francis has explained, the principle of Subsidiarity “allows everyone to assume his or her own role in the healing and destiny of society” (General Audience, September 23, 2020).

It is the final principle of solidarity that I believe can help us give expression to the notion of subsidiarity. The bishops summarize it in this fashion: “We are one human family whatever our

national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that ‘if you want peace, work for justice.’ The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

## The Church and Immigration

I shared with you in the previous section the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine so that they could be the underpinning for communicating with you the Catholic Church’s approach to immigration – a “hot” topic these days! In his message to President Trump on Inauguration Day 2025, Pope Francis noted that, “Inspired by your nation’s ideals of being a land of opportunity and welcome for all, it is my hope that under your leadership the American people will prosper and always strive to build a more just society, where there is no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion.”

Is the Pope asking for open borders? No! But he is asking us not to forget Jesus’ very succinct teaching in Matthew 25<sup>iii</sup>:

### **The Judgment of the Nations.**

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne,

32 and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

33 He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me,

36 naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’

37 Then the righteous will answer him and say, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

38 When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

39 When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’

40 And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

41 Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

43 a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’

44 Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’

45 He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’

46 And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

So how can you and I put into practice what Jesus is teaching as our nation grapples with immigration, but particularly “illegal” immigration? Again, we do have three guiding principles rooted in Catholic Social Teaching<sup>iv</sup>:

1. **“People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.”**

The US Bishops note in addressing this principle that this belief “is based on the biblical and ancient Christian teaching that the goods of the earth belong to all people.” Actually, this is the essential meaning of a “Jubilee Year.” In its biblical roots, the concept of “Jubilee” is defined as a time when God’s people are to return to their original property, release their slaves/indentured servants, and cancel debt. Its celebrations and worship were also meant to be occasions to acknowledge God’s ownership and provision of all one had and possessed.

While the right to private property is defended in Catholic social teaching<sup>v</sup>, individuals do not have the right to use private property without regard for the common good. The Church believes that every person has an equal right to receive from the earth what is necessary for life—food, clothing, shelter. Moreover, every person has the right to education, medical care, religion, and the expression of one's culture.

Unfortunately, all too often people live in fear, danger, or dehumanizing poverty. Clearly, it is not God's will that some of his children live in luxury while others have nothing. In Luke's Gospel, the rich man was condemned for living well while the poor man (who had a name, Lazarus) starved at his doorstep (Lk 16:19-31). Before God all are equal; the earth was given by God to all. When a person cannot achieve a meaningful life in his or her own land, that person has the right to move.

2. **“A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.”**

Pertaining to this principle, the US Bishops note: “While individuals have the right to move in search of a safe and humane life, no country is bound to accept all those who wish to resettle there. By this principle, the Church recognizes that most immigration is ultimately not something to celebrate. Ordinarily, people do not leave the security of their own land and culture just to seek adventure in a new place or merely to enhance their standard of living. Instead, they migrate because they are desperate and the opportunity for a safe and secure life does not exist in their own land.”

This belief is affirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 2241): “*The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him. Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants' duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.*”

I believe it is important that we not overlook the many hardships that immigrants and refugees endure while often longing for the homes and families left behind. Most of us whose ancestry includes immigrants need to recall their contributions to our nation and the cultures that have enriched our society. On the other hand, it is imperative that we collaborate with the family of nations to make it unnecessary for people to leave their own land, eliminating any need for immigration control. Nonetheless, the Church recognizes that this ideal world has not yet been achieved.

3. **“A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.”**

This principle is the summation of the words which opened my letter to you, “Kindness and truth shall meet.” The US Bishops’ teaching on immigration notes that: “A country’s regulation of borders and control of immigration must be governed by concern for all people and by mercy and justice. A nation may not simply decide that it wants to provide for its own people and no others. A sincere commitment to the needs of all must prevail.”

This raises the thorny issue of “illegal” immigration. To this end, the Bishops of the United States offer this sincere counsel:

“Undocumented immigrants present a special concern. Often their presence is considered criminal since they arrive without legal permission. Under the harshest view, undocumented people may be regarded as undeserving of rights or services. This is not the view of Catholic social teaching. The Catholic Church teaches that every person has basic human rights and is entitled to have basic human needs met—food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care.”

Moreover, the Church also teaches that, “Before God we cannot excuse inhumane treatment of certain persons by claiming that their lack of legal status deprives them of rights given by the Creator.”

The bishops also raise the concern that, “Immigration policy that allows people to live here and contribute to society for years but refuses to offer them the opportunity to achieve legal status does not serve the common good. The presence of millions of people living without easy access to basic human rights and necessities is a great injustice.”

Finally, “It is the position of the Catholic Church that pastoral, educational, medical, and social services provided by the Church are never conditioned on legal status. All persons are invited to participate in our parishes, attend our schools, and receive other services offered by our institutions and programs.”

Again, none of what has been written is ignoring the responsibility of leaders to care for their citizens. However, it needs to be framed within the bigger question posed to Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:25) and his response to that inquiry with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). The Church’s concern in grappling with social issues is that they are “moral issues” directly impacting the dignity and sanctity of the human person.<sup>vi</sup>

## The Present Moment

I know that there are people, including those in government, who may feel that the Church needs to stay out of these matters. Nonetheless, as just noted, we are talking about persons who are sacred – who like you and I – are made in the very image and likeness of our Divine Creator. Moreover, for decades the Catholic bishops of the United States have been consistent and steadfast in their calls for a just reform of the nation’s immigration system.

Back in 2011, the US Catholic Bishops wrote<sup>vii</sup>:

“This is not a new mission. More than two thousand years ago, Jesus in his hometown synagogue read the words from Isaiah that outlined his work on earth, as well as the Church’s mission through the centuries and the special tasks of Catholic educators and catechists today:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
. . . liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free . . .” (Lk 4:18).

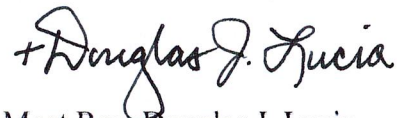
Sharing our social tradition more fully and clearly is an essential way to bring good news, liberty, and new sight to a society and world in desperate need of God’s justice and peace.”

In this moment of our history, the citizens of our nation have been given the opportunity to re-examine our treatment of those who are neighbor to us whether locally or globally while seeking to address the complexity of border and immigration issues. Some elements of this reform that the Catholic Church sees as necessary are: (a) Enforcement efforts should be targeted, proportional, and humane; (b) Humanitarian protections and due process should be ensured; (c) Long-time residents should have an earned pathway to citizenship; (d) Family unity should remain a cornerstone of the U.S. system; (e) Legal pathways should be expanded, reliable, and efficient; and (f) The root causes of forced migration should be addressed.<sup>viii</sup>

In his prayer at the 60<sup>th</sup> Presidential Inauguration, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, the Archbishop of New York, quoted from the second Inaugural Address of President Abraham Lincoln: “with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right.” That is our prayer in this hour invoking Divine Assistance to help our leaders and our nation to see right, like God did for St. Paul whose feast day of conversion we celebrate on January 25<sup>th</sup>.

In the words of the Collect for the Mass for the Progress of Peoples: “O God who gave one origin to all peoples...fill all hearts, we pray, with the fire of your love and kindle in them a desire for the just advancement of their neighbor, that, through the good things which you richly bestow upon all...equity and justice may be established in human society.”<sup>ix</sup>

In the Name of Jesus,



Most Rev. Douglas J. Lucia  
Bishop of Syracuse

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<sup>i</sup> *The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World* (Vatican, 2001)

<sup>ii</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (n. 109) (Vatican, 2006)

<sup>iii</sup> *New American Bible – Revised Edition* (USCCB, 2011)

<sup>iv</sup> *Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples* ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org))

<sup>v</sup> See *Compendium on Catholic Social Teaching* (n. 176 et al.) (Vatican, 2006) and Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891)

<sup>vi</sup> *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 105th World Day Of Migrants and Refugees* (29 September 2019)

<sup>vii</sup> *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (USCCB, 2011)

<sup>viii</sup> *Catholic Elements of Immigration Reform* (USCCB, January 2025)

<sup>ix</sup> *The Roman Missal, 2011 – “29. For the Progress of Peoples” – Masses and Prayers for Various Occasions”*