

## Stop Your Yelling

St Ann  
10/29/17  
Fr. Jim Plough

Let's begin with a story about Franciscans and Jesuits. The story is told by a Jesuit. Two teams were preparing for a boat race on the lake of Galilee, where Jesus and his disciples had frequently rowed. The Jesuits couldn't get their boat moving in the right direction. Every day they'd struggle to get into the boat. If they didn't capsize it, they'd still only get it going in circles.

One of the Jesuits decided to spy on the Franciscans, whose boat was invariably gliding smoothly and rapidly in the right direction. He returned to inform his companions that the Jesuits had it all wrong. "The Franciscans have eight guys rowing and only one guy yelling." My homily is on the theme of "Stop Your Yelling."

There's a lot of yelling these days, in public discourse and even among church goers. Today's gospel is about loving your neighbor, not yelling at him (Matthew 22:34-40.) Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner said love of God and love of neighbor are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. St. Ignatius teaches that love has to be expressed in deeds, not mere words. Love has to get us rowing the boat together, in the right way, and in the right direction.

Our first reading today calls attention to the Lord's insistence that we do not molest or oppress those who are aliens among us. Do not molest or oppress widows and orphans as well. "You were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:,20-26 )."

There is a lot of yelling these days over this very subject. It's called immigration reform. A great majority of Catholics support immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship. Most American citizens agree that "dreamers," those immigrant children who were born in the United States and have grown up here,

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should not face deportation simply because they remain in a precarious legal situation.

Countries have the right to control their territories, keep their citizens safe from criminals, but when people must migrate to find employment or flee war and persecution, their human rights must be respected. Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity which should be respected. “You yourselves were once aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Today’s gospel insists that we love our neighbor. We all need to grab an oar and start getting the boat of immigration reform moving in the right direction. If you do not agree, I invite you simply to imagine that you yourself were suddenly thrust into the role of an alien immigrant. You had to go and live in a foreign land. There was no work for you where you were born. You had to live the rest of your days in a place where you were never fully accepted or afforded the status of “being one of us.” Imagine that you had to live in Russia, or Iran, or North Korea.

On your journey, you had to pay a coyote thousands of dollars to float you over on a rickety boat or sneak you in on an unsafe train or truck or plane. When you reached that distant shore, you had to walk several days in horrible weather. You had to find food and shelter somehow. You had to begin learning the language. You had to adapt to a land that differed radically in so many ways, culturally, religiously, sociologically. You missed the USA and Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day. They were now only a memory.

A recent column by David Brooks in the New York Times speaks of how hard it has been for him to remain civil in dealing with fanatics who shout obscenities at him, yelling irrationally. “People in jobs like mine get a lot of nasty e-mails, often written late at night after libations are flowing. But if I write back to our attackers appreciatively, and offer a way to save face, 90% of the time the next e-mail is

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totally transformed. The brutal mask drops and the human being instantly emerges.”

Mr. Brooks did not refer directly to today’s gospel injunction to love one’s neighbor as one’s self, but the substance of that theme was transparent. Brooks quoted another author who said that the only way to confront fanaticism is with love. Ask the fanatics genuine questions. Paraphrase what they say so they know they’ve been heard Show some ultimate care for their destiny and soul even if you detest the words that come out of their mouths. You engage fanaticism with love! If you make these people feel heard, maybe in some small way you’ll address the emotional bile that is at the root of their political posture. Civility is the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together. Yu don’t have to like someone to love him. Just stop yelling.

In today’s story, the Jesuits got nowhere because they were constantly yelling at one another rather than rowing together. The Franciscans glided smoothly because only one was giving the orders. There are many ways to love your neighbor as yourself. Supporting immigration reform is one of those ways. Love of God and love of neighbor are two sides to the same coin. One cannot have one without the other.

[I am indebted to Richard G. Molloy, S.J. for the story and most of the theme.]