

Last month together with 5 other Christian pastors, I met with the Mayor of Pleasant Hill. We, pastors of various houses of worship including a Rabbi wanted to have our input as the city gears itself for making a policy statement that defines who we are as a city and its residents. But we had another important concern that we wanted to share with the Mayor. Those of you who work with St. Vincent de Paul know that number of people are coming to our doors for some financial assistance. Last year, we had 25 to 50 people a day, Monday through Friday. Last week, one day we had just 3 people. Another day just seven! There is fear. This problem is not only ours, but of other Churches as well. In our discussions, I tried to impress upon our Mayor that the people of Christ the King are very open and welcoming of the poor, immigrants and refugees. The Mayor turned to me and said, Father Paulson, I want you to know that not everyone from Christ the King agrees with you. Yes, I said, that is true. We have a community of 4500 families. The vast majority does. They probably don't write to you. We are a loving and caring community. We love immigrants, we love refugees and we especially love the poor. Christ the King community is defined by not so much by doctrine and precepts. Of course, we try to obey these. But we are defined by our love and care for the poor especially the most vulnerable in society.

Think for a moment! When you hit rock bottom, when no one respects you for some of the bad things you have done, when you want to make a new beginning, what is the one place you go. To church. To meet your priests. Your secrets are our secrets. One may come to our Churches from a place of darkness, but when they leave, we hope they go to a place of light.

During one of his visits to the prison, Pope Francis said, "I have a special relationship with people in prisons, deprived of their freedom. I have always been very attached to them, precisely because of my awareness of being a sinner. Every time I go through the gates into a prison to celebrate Mass or for a visit, I always think: why them and not me? I should be here. I deserve to be here. Their fall could have been mine. I do not feel superior to the people who stand before me.

Translate that statement in the context of the many refugees fleeing persecution and war. Why them? Not me? Why them? Why not you? What would I do in the face of war, starvation or danger? Flee to Mexico or Canada? Europe?

This weekend, Kate made it a point to bring our refugee family to our parish festival. She brought them to the parish Hall as I was calling Bingo. She taught the children to play Bingo with the community. The she took them to the various booths. Why? Because we want to make sure they know this community welcomes, cares and loves.

In the Gospel today, Jesus speaks about another advocate. One thing beautiful about our nation is that our country guarantees legal representation to those men and women who are charged with a serious crime and are too poor to afford a lawyer. The Court determined that a right to counsel is "fundamental" in a system that strives for justice and equality. How well our nation protects this fundamental right is no trivial matter. It is estimated that 80% of state criminal defendants are too poor to hire a lawyer and must depend on court-appointed counsel as their advocate.

This Sunday, the first reading from Acts turns our attention to the Holy Spirit, but it is in the Gospel from John that we find the Spirit specifically described as “Advocate.”

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate- to be with you always. (John 14:16)

Holy Spirit is our advocate or comforter. Some of you older folks have heard the word “paraclete.” There is a context to these words of Jesus. The apostles were feeling broken and forsaken after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Some of them were beaten, brought before judges and thrown behind bars. Jesus wanted to assure them that they were not alone. That he would send them an advocate. An advocate is someone who will defend us in the face of a trial. He or she would help us with the right words to say. The comforter is one to run to our side and pick us up in our need.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church makes us advocates in Jesus’ name. The Church is the advocate for the poor, the destitute and those who cannot be defended. The book of Proverbs says, “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8)

CTK commitment to advocacy for justice and on behalf of the poor and oppressed is based on biblical truths and on the example of Jesus. Jesus defended those whom society condemned. Take for instance, the example of the woman caught up in adultery. He loved the outcast, the despised, the rejected and sinners. He even made excuses for his enemies. From the cross he said, “Father forgive them.” And then he said, they know not what they do.”

When you hear the words of Jesus Mathew 25. “For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me,” you know that He wanted us to be a community that cares, regardless. We see in this passage that Christ identifies himself not with those blessed who serve, but he identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick, and the prisoners. According to William T. Cavanaugh, “What is most radical about Matthew 25 is not that we will be rewarded for doing good to the downtrodden, but that the downtrodden are in fact Christ. Translated for today, what is radical about our ministry is not that we at Christ the King will be rewarded for welcoming or doing good to the poor, immigrants and refugees, but that the poor, the immigrants and refugees are in fact Christ. It is my prayer that all of us here at CTK can see the face of Christ in those we serve – the poor, the immigrants and the refugees.