



Of Refugees, Pilgrims and Caravans

by Ted Keating, SM

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune – without the words,
And never stops at all,
And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.
I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.*

This short poem by Emily Dickinson is best understood by people who have reached their furthest edge and found something well within them out of nowhere that made them go on. It is a fragile release of twisted feelings that overcomes the sense of defeat and the fear or terror that nothing new is possible. How could something so deep within, as if buried, suddenly give us so much power to reimagine a different future that is suddenly within our grasp? Pope Francis, in a new collection of his general audiences titled *On Hope* (see the *Book Corner* in this issue), says, “We must not let hope abandon us. Optimism disappoints, but hope does not.” A liturgical hymn by David Loiselle has the title “Do Not Let Your Hope Drift Away.” Hope is fragile enough that in the “chillest land and on the strangest sea” it feels as if it can drain out of us or drift away into the air.

Psychologists, anthropologists, and theologians say that hope emerging from the endless creativity of the human imagination may well be the defining characteristic of the human being. We are hard-wired to search for the better land and the better life. Saint Augustine says, “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” So, we seem to be created with this spark inside of us that leads us on and on until we find ourselves by losing ourselves in God. Experts in DNA studies claim that we have spent the last 60,000 years as humanity wandering the earth until we have peopled all of it over these years. Oscar Wilde puts it well: “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.”

This issue of *Today's Marists* is filled with such stories of movement. Our cover is the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, not to better their lives, but to avoid the violence being planned for them by the notoriously cruel King Herod who had murdered his own sons. You will find an article about the new ministry of our Marist European Province on the Camino of Santiago de Compostela. 300,000 people (not all Christians) followed this historic and well-known pilgrimage road last year in search of something. The film *The Way* starring Martin Sheen and his son, Emilio Estevez, brought much attention to the centuries-old pilgrimage path as a father seeks meaning in the death of his young son. In recent months the news has fixed our



Left: *Journey of the Magi* by James Tissot
Right: *Refugees La Sagrada Familia* by Kelly Latimore

attention on the Caravans of desperate refugees fleeing death and violence in their Central American countries, not to gain a better life but to simply have a life. Parents are so desperate that they send their children north, often not knowing if they will ever see them again but preferring that to their murder by gangs and drug pushers.

A symbol of this Christmas season included with this article depicts the Holy Family fleeing on the road to Egypt in Central American garb to create a reminder between these flights. We also have an image of the “Wise Men” on the road searching for the “great mystery” being revealed to them in the Star. At the time of Jesus, wisdom was always perceived to be “in the East” and here, the East is moving West for the revelation of the Emmanuel, God with us. There are too many parallels in the Scriptures to mention, from Abraham to St. Paul. The Bible is one long story of movement being drawn forward (sometimes forcefully) by the Word of God and the search for God. Our nation would not exist without the successive waves of refugees from persecution and insurmountable poverty that has dominated our history up to the present day.

So back to hope and searching the imagination that drives pilgrims, refugees, caravans, and perhaps all of

us on our journey to God, our search for a better life for us and our children, and the irony of a nation that goes through these waves and at times says “Enough of these movements. We need to put up walls and legal barriers to those who come here like we came.” Will America survive as a nation by “closing them out” with an attitude that “we have ours and that is enough”? Whole cities have been economically and culturally rebuilt by new immigrants as a famous New York mayor said some years ago.

When our own U.S. Bishops look at all of this and say that we should be faithful to our own U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 implementing the United Nations Convention on Refugees of 1953 following the massive movement of peoples during and after World War II, they are hardly to be unfairly criticized. They have been the first to say that the United States needs to have stable, orderly, humane reform of our immigration laws contrary to how they are pilloried by their enemies. They also believe that no matter what immigration and refugee reforms are chosen, they will always stand with the human dignity of those immigrants that find themselves here - legally and illegally. The consistency of the dignity of the human person is never to be ignored or waived under any circumstance no matter the legal status of any human being. The Letter to the Hebrews puts it well: “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (13:2) These words refer to Abraham and Sarah entertaining the three travelers in the desert stopping to rest with them, but they could equally apply to our Catholic sense that we do entertain Christ among us in the stranger sharing our own journeys of hope and expectation. Faithfulness to our own journeys may well depend upon it.