

Seeing Jesus in the "Stranger"

Rev. Richard Zanotti, CS

I have been a Missionary of St. Charles Scalabrinians for 40 years and a priest for 36 years. The Missionaries of St. Charles is a religious community founded by Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini, bishop of Piacenza (Italy). He saw the need of a religious congregation of both men and women who would dedicate themselves to the care of migrants.

I come from migrant stock. My parents immigrated to Canada from Italy in the 50's. The parish we attended was staffed by Scalabrinian priests. They impressed me at a very early age to think about joining them. They attended to the many Italian immigrants that were arriving at that time.

"I Have Seen Jesus in Many Migrants"

I was exposed to different languages both in the Italian immigrant community from which I come and through my studies during high school and university. I speak Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, three languages that have helped me minister to the many immigrants that have made Canada and the United States their home.

The biblical mandate to welcome the stranger and recognize Jesus in him or her has always inspired me in my ministry. I have seen Jesus in many of the migrants that I have been privileged to serve.

The service I give is pastoral but this also includes a concern for the many other needs that migrants have. In particular, the undocumented and temporary workers are those that suffer most from the traumas of migration. I have also been involved in advocacy work, which involves the important task of fighting for the human rights of migrants.

Pastoral Outreach

At the present time I am coordinator of Hispanic ministry in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. This involves outreach to the thousands of temporary farm workers that work within the archdiocese.

The simple faith of the farm workers and their trust in God's grace inspires me in my own faith journey. I offer my friendship and ministry as a support to these men and women who are separated from spouses and families and who work long hours in the fields and hot houses in the lower mainland region of Vancouver.

These noble persons who sacrifice themselves for their families help me to understand better the sacrifice of the Lord on our behalf. I am grateful that the Lord has called me to this ministry for my life as a person, as a religious and as a priest has been greatly enriched.

No One Is Exempted

I take the call of Pope Francis to heart, "defending (migrants') inalienable rights, ensuring their fundamental freedoms and respecting their dignity are duties from which no one can be exempted." (Vatican City, Feb. 21, 2017)