

Text: Isaiah 58:7-10
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
5 February 2017
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For over a week, the country has been roiling over President Trump's executive order on immigration and refugees, like a big pot of water on a constant boil. During that week I've been worrying about this Sunday, thinking about what I should say.

The advantage of taking a week before speaking is that it gives you time to think and pray. Perhaps because every morning I drink my coffee from a mug that carries a saying of Martin Luther - "Pray, and let God worry" - it was after a week of my worrying that, in a moment of prayer on Friday morning, an answer - a memory, really - came to me from my years before I became a Catholic, when I was a pastor in the Lutheran church. When I was a young Lutheran pastor I learned, after many mistakes, that worship is not a time of political commentary. Worship is for us to praise God, and to thank God, and to receive God's consolations - his healing, his forgiveness, his hope - through his Word, the Bible, the Good News of Jesus Christ - and through his Sacraments, including the Eucharist. Now, there's no shortage out there of responses from Church people to the executive order, if you're interested. The bishops of the United States, as a group and individually, have said many things, and you can read those on Facebook and Twitter. Catholic Relief Services - our American Catholic disaster agency, the people behind our Lenten Rice Bowl - also have waded into the fray, and you can find their comments, and the debate that followed, on Facebook too. Every one of us here has an opinion, and why should my political opinion matter any more than yours, just because I have the opportunity to foist it upon you from the pulpit? And so, in worship today, we do what worship is for: we praise and thank God, we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus into our lives, and we welcome into our hearts God's voice speaking to us in his Word, the Bible.

In that Word of God, we learn that Jesus welcomed us when we were refugees from sin and despair. And it is true that a constant theme in the Bible, through the Old Testament and the New Testament, is that we are to be a people of welcome and hope, coming from the fact that we ourselves have received welcome and hope from Jesus. That theme is there our Old Testament

reading today, with the Lord telling us, “Shelter the oppressed and the homeless,” to Jesus reminding us in the Gospel, “Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father,” to that beautiful verse in the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it,” referring to when the Lord sent three angels, disguised as men, to Abraham and Sarah with news of blessings coming their way. Since our faith begins with the Good News of the Word of God, and our faith is developed as the Word of God speaks to us, in the days ahead, as national debate continues, those Bible verses will be part of what shapes each of our individual decisions and responses on the matter.

The Church response I came across this past week that I found most helpful was from a Lutheran Church body – not the denomination in which I was a pastor, but a different branch of the Lutheran family, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, of which our neighbor, Concordia Lutheran Church down the street, is a part. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod posted this prayer online, a prayer I think tries to take into account all the issues, a prayer which I invite you to join with me in praying now, if you wish:

Gracious Father, in Your Son you prepared a welcome and a home for all people. Remember in mercy all non-citizens and their families who have been unable to enter or return to this country due to the recent executive order. Preserve them from despair and anxiety. Grant Your gracious wisdom to our governing authorities to find a just and honest solution to the difficulties that have arisen. Guide them to protect the citizens of our nation and to honor those who would come here in peace, particularly those seeking relief and refuge from oppression and violence. In our land and throughout this world, Your people raise their voices to beg the gift of peace: Grant peace, we pray, in mercy, Lord. Peace in our time, O send us! For there is none on earth but You, none other to defend us. Amen.