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We Are All Immigrants: The Soul Demands Kinship

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"We are all los inmigrantes, and the soul is The First Immigrant: The Soul cannot be held back by any imaginary boundary drawn against it; not by mountain ranges, not by rivers, nor by human scorn.

The Soul, goes everywhere, like an old woman in her right mind, going anywhere she wishes, saying whatever she wants, bending to mend whatever is within her reach. Wherever the Soul migrates, it brings blessed and often desperately needed new life."
--cpe

Did you see our brother? He is El Salavadorian, a Guatemalteco, un Mexicano, up from Nicaragua, all the way from Panama. He has traveled overland by foot from places where the ruling governments have pounded the poor people into polvo, dust.

Our brother is naked, his buttocks high and round, his clothes and all he owns, tied into a black garbage bag... we have dozens of these plastic bolsas in our pantries, but he has bought the only bolsa he owns at a high price in the market... to float his shoes, his trousers, his shirt, his hat, whatever else he owns that would fit in a tissue box, dry, across the river.

Before he lets himself into the water, he makes the sign of the cross, taking up the crucifix abound his neck, kissing it, then touching it to his forehead, heart, ear and ear, then to lips again.

Naked he lets himself into the river.

The water is cold. It takes his breath as it whirls around his private parts, the protected creases of his God-made body.

He comes from a far inland village and does not know how to swim.

He is literally praying to be able to cross this rushing water up to his chin, pushing his black bolsita before him. He is praying to walk not on water, but in the water... to make it through the powerful currents that easily buckle the knees and push even a strong man down.

Haven?t we, somewhere in our lives, struggled to stay upright in a river whose currents are so strong? Haven?t we given everything to try to cross to another side where we can live, instead of surely wither? Haven?t we in some way, suffered all these?

> And now, from all our travails and all our triumphs, don?t we find that through the bloodlines of our souls, we are not separate and not alone, but related to every soul who ever struggles and strives toward goodness?

Have you seen our little sister Graciita who has been so ill. She has been in the hospital in Mexico where administrators will not allow her to leave until she pays the bill in full.

This is how some hospitals keep people in need from coming to the hospital for help. Or keep them there, once they come to save their lives. But, Gracilita has no money. And her children, the eldest being eight years old, are fending for themselves on the roads.

The hospital every day adds impossible amounts to her bill, making the payoff to be released, higher and higher. She will never be able to pay the bill. She will never be released from the hospital... unless she escapes... sneaking past guards posted just for this reason, hometown old men who carry wooden batons. The old men are paid a pittance ?to guard? the ill.

Yet, where might she run to with her children should she somehow find freedom? How shall she avoid arrest for not paying the usurious bill? Where is a place to recover so she can work to support her little family.

One kind of death awaits her and her children if she remains in hospital and her children in the streets. Another kind of death has been arranged for her and her children at the border. She?s not allowed to cross at the border between her natal country and a country many of her people have taken to their hearts. There are no full life and freedom sentences for her and her children. Only slow-death sentences.

Haven?t we too, somewhere in our lives, been one of the millions of Gracilitas? Haven?t we stood all alone before judges who condemned without mercy? Haven?t we had times when no one spoke for us, no one rose to defend us, but rather said we deserved all the travail we?d gotten? Haven?t we been held back, given predatory bills to pay, been broken in an unjust system, not allowed full choices for reason of our status, our looks, the zeitgeist, the manmade walls?

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Have you seen our brothers, our beautiful brothers in the apartment cells of our cities, living eight, ten, twenty young and old men to one room. Daytimes, giving all their bones and blood to hauling boiling tar, welding without protective leather clothing, working heavy construction with no helmets or visors protecting their precious eyes.

Right before my eyes one Mexicano brother working on a US housing project was shocked and thrown into the air when the reciprocating saw he was holding sawed through siding under which lay hidden master wires for the electrical box. His wealthy ?supervisor? with big new V8 truck fired him that very moment.

The man who was injured, who could not speak English, wandered away, dazed, hurt, and without medical attention. And the ?supervisor? cared nothing about it, not one whit, no matter who protested or how, no matter who told ?the supervisor? about late injuries from electrical shocks, about electrical injury to the heart. The ?supervisor? had no concerns about the heart. Not about the man?s. Not about his own.

We have all seen our brothers walking in the poisoned chemical waters, cleaning up after the bilious flood, our brothers and sisters taking up what others will not touch and will not work at for the pittance paid. There is no OSHA oversight here. Our brothers do demolition of old buildings but without filtration masks to guard their lungs. Our brothers sweep the infected materials from crimes scenes in the streets. They are given no protective gloves nor quality ventilating masks as they etch pavement with chemicals, as they lay down layers of acrid varnish onto wooden floors in enclosed spaces.

And haven?t we been exposed to toxins, unawares ourselves? And haven?t we suffered from being given the hardest work for the least praise or pay? And haven?t we had no recompense? And haven?t we learned to live with all that has come from that? And haven?t we learned, at least a little bit, to rise up and speak back to

injustice for having near drowned in it?

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Do you know the day laborers. They have lost their lands long ago and been Impoverished by greedy and powerful usurpers in their own home country. No one was there to help, to guard them, to help them. Or those who have tried to help have been imprisoned, murdered, sent into exile. The people lived on anyway, pulled themselves from the mud, and they have come here. And stand on street corners and at convenience stores from early dawn onward, hoping to be picked to do the most work for the least amount of pay.

Yet, their employers take their social security and other taxes out of their wages, but then take more too and pocket it themselves. The workers are used to being so heavily taxed and paying unjust bribes in their home country, they do not question what any employer does. And they are afraid, mortally afraid that if they do, they will be let go. Or la migra called. Justice is not a word they know well. Just one they long so for. Just one they have died for.

And when the employer lies and says his materials cost more now and the job pays less now, instead of knowing how to figure the real costs themselves and seeing they are being duped, the laborers bow. They bow and figure out how to fit at least five more men in with the twenty men to one room, to make their little monies go farther.

Unscrupulous car dealers seeing the laborers cannot read well, add the family?s cash down-payments back into the total price of the car, so the family signs a fraudulent contract agreeing to pay 150% percent of the asking price instead of 100% minus the down-payment. And the little families will pay the unfair rate without understanding. With all the heart in them they will pay the unjust price and on time.

And their own people, those more wily amongst them will offer them ?citizen papers? for a thousand dollars. And the laborers will pay this enormous amount for each family member, saving and saving each week to pay this enormous amount... only finding out later, usually after a raid on their place of employment by the government, that the papers they bought at such great striving and price, are just that, paper without passage.

Yet, they accept all these burdens, including mockery, harassment, and exploitation, disregard for their very being... without complaint. For they are a conquered people for the past hundreds of years, and they are used to it all and think this a normal way of life, to be ever watching over one?s shoulder, to be treated like dirt, to be scorned and reviled. For nearly four-hundred years, this is what they have learned to expect from the governments, large and small, where they lived.

Haven?t we all at some time been like one of the millions men and women, strangers in a strange land, bearing such burdens of revulsion and mockery, such demeaning and greed, and is there any heavier cross than to try to live under daily injustice, dally, daily, daily... and lies about your true motives, the motives of your soul, the dreams of your family, the goodness of your people?

We have experience in this don?t we? We too have had to somewhere bow our heads and take the blows.

> And now, from all our travails and all our triumphs, don?t we find that through the bloodlines of our souls, we are not separate and not alone, but related to every soul who ever struggles and strives toward goodness?

Do you know our Ukrainian and Russian émigré brothers and sisters? Something in the men so brave and loyal, they sing their old country songs as they patch our roofs across this country. Some tenants complain about the men?s singing.

?They?re probably here illegally,? they hiss.

On another day, a middle-aged Russian immigrant, a workman with a torn maroon sweatshirt and a big belly, stands in the office supply store, bellowing to the old woman clerk who has been disrespectful to him. Instead of telling him kindly he can only have a store credit but not a cash refund, she snaps that he cannot speak English well enough.

When I get there, he is crying... literally crying out the heart-rending cry of his ancestors at the old woman who has forgotten herself... a cry that only makes sense to those who know the deep heart of family feeling between los inmigrantes and others, an expectation that all will act like family. Yet to the old woman who in that moment put cruelty toward others above reasoned heart, he cried out ?YOU are not my relative! You cannot speak to me this. You are NOT my relative!?

And us? Haven?t we been hissed at by those who wish us ill for us, those who want to mock, humiliate, bring down the lash on our tenderness? And haven't we cried too? Oh my, haven't we wept? Haven?t we been exiled for simply being of a different tribe? Hasn?t this occurred where we have fallen down to the bricks hard... from the weight of other?s opprobrium, or from our own culturally learned self-condemnation.... and wasn?t there at least once when no one came come to help us? Haven?t we met the cruel person over and over whose heart carries no regret, only self-anointing as ?official corrector of the universe??

Haven?t we all lived through a time when those who want us to hurry up and not look so needy or so bleeding of heart and soul, for us to not take up so much of their time... weren?t we too supposed to cooperate with their harms to us? Weren?t we supposed to be more efficiently chastised, more ?something? we could not understand, and more investing in not inconveniencing the heart, soul or mind of anyone of power?

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Friends in government in New York tell me there are estimated to currently be more than 10,000 illegal Irish immigrants in New York City and surrounds. They struggle like all others for they must hide in many ways. Also in NYC, there are many souls who have no legal documents and they are from all parts of mother Africa, and from Santo Domingo and other parts of the Caribbean, and from Egypt, and from nearly every other part of the world. And because they are ?underground? and suffer from fear of exposure, from lack of free movement and opportunity, there are those who give them refuge, who ease their ways, who look at their hearts and not their papers. Who believe a living faith is not founded on law of the land, but built on law of preservation of life and soul, the holy ?doing unto others.?

And too, isn?t there at least one who has ?covered? us momentarily, stepped outside of what is considered proper in the culture, and tended to another soul in need, instead? Haven?t we too been near a dream of a life, and yet not able to fully participate in it because gatekeepers find us wanting on principles manmade, rather than principles belonging to the soul?

Yet, hasn?t someone stepped in to speak gentle and grace for us some time, one time, or more? Hasn?t someone at least once sheltered us while others speak harshness and try to tear us apart and cause us to shed our souls or our blood? Don?t we remember that our faces are imprinted on any person who has helped us in our travails. Don?t we all remember that whomsoever we help in their travails, our fingerprints remain on their souls forever?

We are not separate from one another nor from El Cristo, He, first and foremost, an immigrant without papers fleeing into Egypt under cover of night, across all national boundaries set against He and His family.

So now, from all our travails and all our triumphs?and His-- and His mother?s and father?s - don?t we find that through the soul?s ancient bloodline, we together are not separate and not alone, but related to every soul who ever struggles and strives toward goodness?

For goodness...
that would be us.
That would be all ?the them.?
That would be Him.
That would be all of us.

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