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Dear Speaker Boehner

Michael Sean Winters | Apr. 2, 2014 Distinctly Catholic

Dear Speaker Boehner,

I know you are a busy man, but I hope you will take the time to read the text of Cardinal O?Malley?s sermon yesterday at the Mass at the Border. You can find the full text posted here [1].

Preaching upon the Gospel text of the parable of the Good Samaritan, Cardinal O?Malley said:

We come to the desert today because it is the road to Jericho; it is traveled by many trying to reach the metropolis of Jerusalem. We come here today to be a neighbor and to find a neighbor in each of the suffering people who risk their lives and at times lose their lives in the desert.

Pope Francis encourages us to go to the periphery to seek our neighbor in places of pain and darkness. We are here to discover our own identity as God?s children so that we can discover who our neighbor is, who is our brother and sister.

As a nation of immigrants we should feel a sense of identification with other immigrant groups seeking to enter our country.

The debate about immigration reform is not just a debate about ?them.? It is a debate about ?us.? What kind of people are we going to be? Are we going to tap into the ugly, nativist side of the American psyche or are we going to tap into the more dominant theme in American culture, that recognizes the simple fact that a country that welcomes immigrants is not impoverished by their presence but enriched. What would America be like if the Irish had not come? What would America be like if the Italians had not come? What would America be like if the Jews had not come?

Mr. Boehner, I am not a Republican, but I know that your party seeks to not only celebrate the importance of human life and the traditional family, but to enact policies that protect life and strengthen family life. In our highly individualistic age, why would your party not embrace the possibility of 11 million new citizens for whom a commitment to family is the real, not just the rhetorical, foundation of society. Why would your party not welcome people who value life and celebrate children in ways our Anglo society no longer does? Why would your party turn a blind eye to the suffering and death that stalks the border?

If you do not have time to read Cardinal Sean?s sermon, at least look at some of the photos of the event. One jumped out at me [2]. It shows Cardinal O?Malley distributing Holy Communion through the slats in the border fence to the Catholics on the other side. Have you, Mr. Speaker, ever had to receive communion through a fence? Is that image not a perfect metaphor for what the love of Christ does, break through human barriers? Not just at this Mass, but at every Mass, we pray for the pope, for the bishop, for the clergy, and for the whole Church. Mr. Speaker, when those Catholics on the Mexican side of the border prayed at Mass yesterday, they were praying for you. When you pray at Mass on Sunday, you are praying for them. They are our people, fellow Catholics. Do not make a mockery of your prayers Mr. Speaker and hear their prayer.

At the press conference, Cardinal Sean asked that the politicians in Washington look at the issue of immigration as an ethical and human issue, not a political issue. Of course, asking a politician to eschew politics is like asking an Italian to eschew pasta or an Irishman to eschew the fruit of the vine. Still, I hope you will take up the cardinal?s plea, even if you only do so alone, in the sanctuary of your conscience. I believe that you would find there the grace and the courage to go to your caucus and say, ?You can vote no on this, but I am bringing it to a vote.? Your fellow members respect your love for your Church. They respect you. If you said that, in conscience, you must permit a vote, they will listen.

Unlike Cardinal Sean, I also invite you to think about the politics. Your party has little chance of ever reclaiming the White House unless you stop impeding immigration reform. Call Jeb Bush and ask him what he thinks. Call Chris Christie. Call any of the non-Tea Party potential candidates and ask them what chance they think they have of winning a general election if they can only garner 27% of the Latino vote. I know that this coming November?s election is a midterm, not a general, election and that the composition of the electorate will be different. But, those members of the GOP base who oppose immigration are not going to vote for the Democrats if you permit a vote on the Senate bill. As a matter of politics, as well as a matter of humanity and morality, let the Senate bill come to a vote.

Last week, a little girl jumped over the fence at St. Peter?s Square to touch Pope Francis. She spoke about her father who was then in a detention center. The next day, the pope and the President met and the little girls? father was released. One down, 11 million to go. All of our undocumented immigrants live in a kind of detention center, confined to the shadows of society, always vulnerable to exploitation and hardship. They need to be integrated into the rest of society. At this point, Mr. Speaker, the fate of those 11 million souls is in your hands. If you allow a vote, immigration reform will pass. It is not a perfect bill but it will vastly improve the lives of 11 million aspiring Americans. At a time when America as a whole seems incapable of aspiration, why would we not want these people who have sacrificed everything to make better lives for their families? Why would we want to keep them in the shadows? Why would we confine so many to receiving communion through the slats in a fence?

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[1] http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/bordermass
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