



Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich is pictured in a 2019 photo. In remarks Jan. 19 at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, where he was participating in a pilgrimage, Cupich reassured migrants in his archdiocese that the Catholic community stands with them in the face of reported plans for a mass deportation by the new Trump administration of people in the U.S. without authorization. (OSV News/Bob Roller)



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President Donald Trump came out swinging on the issue of immigration.

"First, I will declare a national emergency at our southern border," Trump said in his [inaugural address](#). "All illegal entry will immediately be halted. And we will begin the process of returning millions and millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which they came."

Trump promised to reinstate the "Remain in Mexico" policy. He pledged to send troops to our southern border "to repel the disastrous invasion of our country."

The leaders of the U.S. hierarchy do not throw punches. But they are setting down some markers.

"While we wish the new administration success in promoting the common good, the reports being circulated of planned mass deportations targeting the Chicago area are not only profoundly disturbing but also wound us deeply," said Cardinal Blase Cupich [in a statement](#) issued during a visit to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. "We are proud of our legacy of immigration that continues in our day to renew the city we love. This is a moment to be honest about who we are."

Cupich acknowledged that governments have the responsibility to defend their borders, but strongly affirmed, "we also are committed to defending the rights of all people, and protecting their human dignity."

Cardinal Joseph Tobin, [speaking at an interfaith gathering](#) in Newark, New Jersey, the week before the inauguration, said, "We're deeply concerned about the potential impact of mass deportation on children and families. Within the Catholic tradition and other faith expressions represented here today, we're able to see the humanity in everyone."

At the same event, Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, Texas, chair of the bishops' committee on migration, was equally firm. "We are at risk of losing part of our soul as a nation, so this is a time of great concern," he said.

Translation: "If you are going to go after the migrants, you have to go through us."



Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, Texas, the U.S. bishops' migration committee chairman, speaks at St. Lucy Church in Newark, New Jersey, Jan. 13, during an interfaith gathering of religious leaders committed to supporting immigrants facing the threat of mass deportation by the incoming Trump administration. At left is Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark. The event was co-sponsored by the Archdiocese of Newark and Faith in Action, an international faith-based organizing network. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

The bishops have the strongest possible backup for their forceful statements. Pope Francis, in a television interview, [said](#) of Trump's plans for mass deportations: "If it is true, it will be a disgrace, because it makes the poor wretches who have nothing pay

the bill for the inequalities."

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan did not mention migration or migrants in his [invocation](#) at the inauguration ceremony, and he was criticized on [social media](#) for the omission. I am not sure I agree with the criticism, although Dolan could have found a creative way to affirm the human dignity of all people, or something that might have registered concern at the dehumanization of migrants that is a standard Trump trope. It was a teaching moment. Still, I am less concerned that our bishops be "prophetic" than I am that they be effective and if Dolan thought it would be more effective to pull Trump aside quietly and put in a good word for migrants, he might well be right.

Cardinal Blase Cupich did not mention abortion specifically when he gave an [invocation](#) at the Democratic National Convention last summer, and pro-life activists [pummeled](#) him for the omission. But Cupich did mention the "profound aspirations of life, freedom, justice, and unbound hope" and "human dignity." He planted a seed. Dolan should have done likewise. I don't expect pro-life activists to call out Dolan for failing to mention church teaching. The lives of immigrants apparently don't count.

For all Trump's rhetoric, it is not clear what he actually is going to do on immigration. In his speech Monday, Trump said he would "use the full and immense power of federal and state law enforcement to eliminate the presence of all foreign gangs and criminal networks bringing devastating crime to U.S. soil." If the federal government wants to deport those who committed violent crimes, here or before they arrived, the Biden administration would have done the same. But if overstaying a visa counts as a crime, we will have a problem.

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Trump's border czar, Tom Homan, had been promising mass deportations would begin as soon as Trump took the oath of office. But on the eve of the oath-taking, he had to [dial back expectations](#), admitting that the raids planned for Chicago had been compromised by leaks to the media. But Homan himself [said](#) about four weeks ago: "The mayor of Chicago, not a real bright guy, says Tom Homan isn't welcome in Chicago. Well guess where Tom Homan's going to be day one? Chicago, Illinois."

There has always been a "gang that couldn't shoot straight" quality to the Trump team. We are right to worry about what Trump will do, but there is something slothful about the man that is strangely comforting. Whatever dictatorial ambitions he harbors may lose steam because he lacks the staying power. One can say of dictatorship what is said about socialism: "The trouble with socialism is that it takes up too many nights." Will Trump let policy get in the way of his golf game?

The bishops have not been idle these past few months. The good people at the Catholic Legal Immigration Network have been busy teaching Catholic leaders, including bishops, about the legal rights of migrants, how to cope with an immigration enforcement raid and mobilizing a network of lawyers ready to defend migrants in court. The bishops are prepared to stand by our immigrant brothers and sisters, to protect them and defend them. All Catholics should be prepared to do the same.

Related: [Analysis: Trump's inaugural address a mix of ego and doom-and-gloom](#)

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