


Testimony
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating April 19, 2020

Communications with the editor should be sent to j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

Editorial

After the calendar, the Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for the Second Sunday of Easter. Tom Keene's poem is *Dear Virus*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

Following the poem is a March 26 opinion piece, "Immigrants who are held in detention must be released immediately," by Washington *Post* columnist Esther J. Cepeda, who has graciously granted us permission to republish it. In addition to the copyright notice at the head of the article, she adds, "Thanks so much, and please do include my Twitter handle :) Esther." So here is the Twitter handle: <https://twitter.com/estherjcepeda>

Calendar

Events in Texas cities involving a gathering of ten or more people have been canceled because of the global pandemic.

Alternatives

Webinar: Gun Violence in the Americas, Focus: Mexico

Powerful, important and very disturbing webinar from the Consortium of Universities for Global Health.

With the world's highest rate of lethal gun violence, the Americas are in the midst of an unmitigated public health crisis. Just six countries account for over half of 250,000 annual global gun deaths: the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Guatemala. But activists, medical professionals, human rights workers, and policy experts are working together to stop this bloodshed and the

vectors that make it happen. This webinar brings together leading researchers and advocates on this issue. Very informative slideshow.

This 1-hour webinar is archived; it can be watched at any time:
<https://www.cugh.org/events/webinar-gun-violence-americas>

Tuesday April 14, 9:00am, Ph.D. Thesis defense (sociology), “Practicing Minority Religion: Interrogating the Role of Race, National Belonging, and Gender Among Sikhs in the US and England,” Simranjit Khalsa (Rice University). Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/j/935560033?pwd=S0MxZ3gxQndZbGJ0Nkszd29UNzZGdz09>
Meeting ID: 935 560 033, Password: 412654

Friday April 17, 12:00pm-1:00pm, virtual presentation, “The Role of Public Defender in Today’s Criminal Justice System,” Stephen Musselman (Maryland Office of the Public Defender). The focus will be how to protect rights of defendants while sheltering in place:
<https://stedwards.zoom.us/j/640429692>, Password: 256579

Tuesday April 21, 4:00pm, online lecture, “Greening at Home,” Rick Wilson, Lisa Lin, and Richard Johnson (all of Rice University). Zoom meeting:
<https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/j/513997842>
Meeting ID: 513 997 842

Wednesday April 22, 12:00pm-1:00pm, virtual presentation, “Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Human Flourishing, Mark Graves (St. Edward’s University). <https://stedwards.zoom.us/j/305282341>, Password: 780021

Second Reading (First Peter 1:3-9)

I must say that the translation of this passage that appears in the Lectionary obscures its meaning. The Christians in what is now the nation of Turkey were enduring a persecution. The author writes in the name of the apostle Peter in order to maintain anonymity for safety’s sake, and the contents of the letter appear to be a homily written on the occasion of a group of baptisms. The author refers to the trials of the persecution as an assaying or testing, which is “more precious than gold.” Since the meaning is so obscured, I give you my translation:

Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus, Messiah, who according to His great mercy begot us anew into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus, Messiah, from the dead, into an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, preserved in the heavens for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith in a salvation that is ready to be revealed. At the end time you will rejoice in this, even if for a little while it is necessary to be made sad by various trials, so that the assaying of your faith, a testing more precious than gold, which perishes and which is assayed by fire, may be found amidst praise, glory, and honor in the revelation of Jesus, Messiah, whom you love while not seeing, in whom, though not yet seeing, you will rejoice with an inexpressible and glorified joy, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of the living.

Third Reading (John 20:19-31)

"Doubting Thomas!" I always, even in childhood, recoiled from sermons about Doubting Thomas; they invariably criticized him for a lack of faith. Perhaps it was a personality flaw that, even as a child, I thought skepticism was a sign of honesty rather than a tendency that I should suppress. Later in life I discovered that the Johannine Gospel, where we meet "Doubting Thomas," approves of reliance on evidence. "And he who watched has given witness, and his testimony is true, and he knows what he is saying is true, so that you too may believe" (John 19:35).

A recent dramatic portrayal of the life and spirit of Dorothy Day (a saint who did not want to be regarded a saint lest she be turned into a lifeless pillar like Lot's wife) emphasized her amazement that the Catholic Church, to which she had converted, offered so little evidence of the kind of moral life its teachings demanded. The portrayal highlighted the social teachings of the Church, especially Jesus' rejection of violence and war. Is there not much to be said for demanding evidence of such morality being really present in the life of the Church?

Doubting Thomas was particularly intent upon seeing Jesus' wounds: the nail marks and the puncture in the side. In fact, the Johannine Gospel's account of Thomas' demand is the only evidence we have that the Romans used nails in the crucifixion of Jesus, probably to keep him and the other two convicts who shared

the crossbeam from trying to slide their arms closer together over their heads for better leverage. The demand to see the wounds leads us to another implication of seeing evidence: It is incumbent on us, as Christians, to see and be moved by the damage done to those who share the world with us. It is not the role of the Christian to deny, numb ourselves, or engage in cover-ups.

Poem

Dear Virus,

You teach us (when we let you)
how in our protective separations we unite,
how even in keeping our six feet
of social distance we thank one another,
how nations, separated over centuries,
face the fact of being one in danger, one in safety.

In addressing you, dear Virus, we make real
our inmost powers, apart and together,
as we do a round-dance where, with each
of our single bodies, we come in concert
with the music of our souls.

Tom Keene and Muse
March 18, 2020
www.tomkeenesmuse.com

Immigrants who are held in detention must be released immediately

Esther J. Cepeda

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As we brace for the brunt of this fast-spreading pandemic, it's a pressing national security imperative that immigrants held in detention be released to their families immediately.

The federal government is keeping scores of people cheek by jowl in facilities that have been well-documented to be lacking in proper ventilation, food and even clean, running water. And many of these detainees already have compromised immune systems due to age, chronic medical conditions or pregnancy.

As if it weren't bad enough to put immigrants in grave danger of becoming a huge vector of COVID-19 infections, this situation also puts at risk the people who police them, manage their cases, offer them medical care, defend them in court, prepare their food and clean up after them.

Whatever you might imagine when talking about immigrants in detention, the truth is that most either have no criminal record or have already served time for any offenses they've committed while in our country. And nearly all unauthorized immigrants who are being held in detention have already been processed and cataloged in multiple Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health and Human Services, and other system databases.

"Based on countless reports from advocates, ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) doesn't even give soap or hot water, they're giving out moldy food — the day-to-day conditions have led to dozens of deaths. Nine, so far, in this fiscal year," said Silky Shah, the executive director of the Detention Watch Network. "To be clear (a major outbreak of coronavirus infections) is imminent if it's not already happening, and while ICE has not reported any, we also know widespread testing also isn't happening."

Shah and a group of leaders from other immigrant-advocacy organizations recently held a briefing in which they called on the Trump administration to suspend ICE raids, postpone deportations and release immigrants from detention.

"We need to let them out before they get sick," Ranit Mishori, the senior medical adviser for Physicians for Human Rights and professor at Georgetown University School of Medicine, told me. "People from the outside who see detainees, health care workers and detention facility workers are actually putting the detainees more at risk, because those people come and go. The detainees themselves are sitting ducks for infection. Isolation is for those who are sick; the time to prevent immigrant detainees from getting sick and having an outbreak is now, before people need mass medical care."

The experts noted that President Donald Trump is exposing an already vulnerable population to even higher risk by putting policies in place that have the effect of making immigrants likelier to get sick and scared to seek medical care if they suspect they've contracted coronavirus. These policies include the public

charge rule, which penalizes legal and unauthorized immigrants alike for accessing publicly funded safety-net programs like food assistance.

“We need to understand this moment for what it is — a disaster like Hurricane Katrina,” said Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center. “We already have protocols in place for state agencies to let their criminal detainees be set free. ... It’s important to remember that we need to take care of people regardless of whether they are an immigrant, a detainee or a criminal; we must be singularly focused on everyone’s health.”

Due to lack of transparency, it’s unclear what protocols or policies are in place for the agencies and facilities that house immigrants to ensure detainees get information and resources to protect themselves against an outbreak.

When reports tell of squalid conditions in which fresh food and drinking water are hard to come by, much less soap or showering facilities, it’s difficult to imagine that immigrants, many of whom don’t speak either English or Spanish, are being informed about — much less protected against — a quickly spreading virus.

There are seeds of hope, however.

Earlier this week, New Jersey became the nation’s leader in releasing inmates — 1,000 — to curb the possibility of widespread coronavirus contagion. It followed New York state, Cleveland, Ohio, and Tulsa, Okla., in releasing prisoners.

Kentucky is making progress in releasing hundreds of nonviolent inmates, and news reports indicate that Trump is considering issuing an executive order to release older, nonviolent offenders from federal prisons.

Taking the same precautions with immigrant detainees who, overwhelmingly, have committed only the civil violation of residing in the country without authorization, is the smart and logical next step.

Links

Pax Christi International
<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.
<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas

<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi Dallas

<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio

<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee

<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center

<http://www.sanantoniopeace.center>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

www.txccedp.org

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio

www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/

Climate Change

www.creation-care.com

NowCastSA

www.nowcastsa.com/