

sabiduría compartida
(wisdom shared)



A Collection of
Scripture reflections
Written by immigrants living in
Southern Minnesota

This is a collection of reflections that were shared with me by a variety of immigrants to our area. Some of these people have lived among us for 20 years or more, some have come here very recently. What they share is a deep faith that we can all learn from. It's a faith that has seen them through the darkest moments, through trials and sufferings. Some have crossed a dangerous desert to be here, and they all have left behind those they love most in the world and the place they call home, because it was no longer a safe place for them, or no longer a place where they could find sustenance for their loved ones. I am deeply grateful that they have shared their personal thoughts and stories with us.

Some of the names in this collection have been changed because of the preference of the author. All the countries of origin are accurate, and the location of where the author is now living. They are living among us – a blessing to our communities.

All artwork shared in this collection are from paintings done by Angel, an incredibly talented young man from Guatemala, now living in Pipestone, MN (see page 5). I cannot thank him enough for letting me share his work with you.

I hope you will read what they have to share with compassion, realizing that few of us have had to face the obstacles in life that they have. I have been blessed to hear their stories, and I hope you will be blessed by hearing them as well. We dedicate this to all those who love God and seek refuge. May we welcome them, so they are no long strangers, but truly brothers and sisters.

Lisa Kremer OFS

Sept. 27th, 2020

The World Day of Migrants and Refugees

“Forced Like Jesus Christ to Flee”

Table of Contents

Exodus 23:9 by Maria from Guatemala 1

Malachi 3:5 by Lilia from Mexico 2

Genesis 1:27-28 by Ana from Venezuela 3

Leviticus 19:33-34 by Manuel from Mexico..... 4

Colossian 3:12-13 by Angel from Guatemala..... 5

Isaiah 41:10 by Carmen from Mexico 6

Isaiah 26:20-21 by Vivian & Amy- Guatemala..... 7

Luke 6:20-26 by Lisa Kremer..... 8

This collection has been created as a gift for the people of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester for Immigration Sunday, September 27, 2020 from Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota, and is meant for distribution in the communities of the Diocese.

“**Y**ou shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt”. Exodus 23:9

Some years ago, I made a decision that would change my life completely. It took a lot for me to be able to make it to the United States. I had to leave behind my family and my lifestyle. When I first arrived, it was difficult to start a whole new life in a completely different world. Not many people accepted us because they saw us as a threat. According to this verse in Exodus, we shouldn't treat people poorly because they are not like us. Being an immigrant has not been easy. One of the hardest things I've faced here is finding a good and decent job. Most jobs available to us are back breaking, dirty and difficult, paying only minimum wage. It isn't enough to support our families. Sometimes people get two jobs and hope it is enough. Having to work all the time just to maintain your family is tough. You find yourself constantly missing out on the lives of your children. You miss their games, concerts, and quality time with them. Fortunately for me, my kids are older now and I don't have to worry as much because they are becoming good people and the older ones have jobs too.

Sometimes I wonder if leaving it all behind was worth it. But then I look at my children and I know it was one of the best decisions I ever made. Coming here gave my kids so many opportunities to have a better life than I did. We haven't been in it alone. Ever since I came here I met so many wonderful people and I've developed great friendships. Our friends have helped me and my family through some very difficult times, and for that, I can't thank them enough. Although being an immigrant has not been easy, I have always been able to rely on God to get me through the most difficult times. I know that anything is possible if you believe in God. Most people have heard about the Promised Land in the Bible, but what most fail to realize is that for an immigrant, this is our Promised Land.

Maria from Guatemala – now living in Worthington, MN

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 3:5

We know for a fact that the laws of this country apply to every person, even to the foreigners and we all have one God who is just and gives us our daily bread. His sacred hand is always with us, giving us what we need. What we desire for our children is to live a life with dignity. God gives us a salary here to be able to live. Thanks be to our Lord and King of Kings. He has shown us many beautiful things, and grants us mercy, even when we do not deserve it. He always shows us his love.

Lilia from Mexico – now living in Rochester, MN



“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”
Genesis 1:27-28

In this reading I hear that we are all created equal because God created us in His image. We should not establish any difference just because we came from a different country, because we were all “foreigners in the land of Egypt”.

Many times we were abused, physically, verbally and psychologically. They “labeled” us just because we came from a different country, without considering that is the least important thing because we are the same as other people.

We also need to comply with our obligations. We have rights and needs to be met, and families to support.

Ana from Venezuela – now living in Rochester, MN

“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.”
Leviticus 19:33-34

After walking for two nights and two days, I arrived in this new land. I didn't feel welcomed; I felt persecuted to return to the land where I came from. But they needed me to pick the harvest, and I found myself very confused. They persecute me, but they need me – what is this? Ten, twenty, thirty years have passed since I arrived in this country, and things are the same. We are needed, and yet they are looking for us because we are in a land that is not ours. We don't speak the language, and yet, they need our labor. It is very hard to understand all this, but all is possible when we put everything in the hands of our Creator, our Lord.

I met Him through this suffering. I live with uncertainty because I feel I am not from here, but God helps me with these feelings and He fills me with the joy that only He can give. Walking with Jesus strengthens me and helps me to keep walking without being afraid of pain or sorrow. Jesus teaches me hope and love and He helps me to continue to walk in a land that is not mine.

Manuel from Mexico – now living in Rochester, MN

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other. Colossians 3:12-13a

My artwork is titled “Touched by One”. One can lead to some, and some can lead to many. Mother Teresa’s life shows the impact of one. The Last Supper reflects the power of some. By our faith and through our church, we are bound to many. That is how my life from Guatemala to America has unfolded. Someone was kind to me. From that kindness, I developed some friends. From that small group of friends, I discovered my faith community of St. Leo Parish in Pipestone. Beautifully, I have been touched by One.

Angel from Guatemala – now living in Pipestone, MN.



“Do not fear, for I am with you;
do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,
Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:10

Since I have come to the United States, I have been fortunate to feel God’s presence by my side. I have experienced for the last 27 years different administrations in the US government and have witnessed how some administrations have been less positive towards immigration. I am sorry to say that I have seen the less educated and the poor suffer the most. Thankfully, God has been by my side and I have been able to complete my college education. In the past couple of years God has been calling me to help those immigrants who have not had it so easy. I am thankful that God has put me on their paths.

I came to the US as an exchange student and with a work VISA. After graduation a company sponsored me so that I could become a resident. Many immigrants are not so fortunate. If it had not been for God’s help and His companionship, I would not be here today, and for that I am most grateful.

Carmen from Mexico – now living in Rochester, MN

“Go, my people, enter your chambers, and close the doors behind you; Hide yourselves for a brief moment, until the wrath is past. See, the lord goes forth from his place, to punish the wickedness of the earth’s inhabitants; the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and no longer conceal the slain. Isaiah 26:20-21

This Bible verse was written a long time ago, but we can apply it to what we are living through today. Here God is telling us to not fear or worry, but he is also giving us an advanced warning. God is telling us to stay inside for a moment, he assures us that it’s not going to take long, because this virus will pass just like any other storm has. Yet he is also warning us that there will be an aftermath, remains/ruins left behind by the storm. God has warned us through the bible, but it is up to us to listen or to turn our backs to his message. So, while we are living through this phase, we as a society have to decide on our own to be obedient, we have to do the most we can do as *individuals* to help reduce the rate of infected people. Everyone can put in effort, even if you need to go out for work, or go out for daily necessities, or even just because you need some fresh air. We can practice social distancing, wearing masks, washing our hands more often, and if possible, even staying at home. We can use that time to learn new skills, meditate, practice self-care, strengthen our relationships, and in prayer. We should use this time to grow our relationship with God. Maybe we didn’t appreciate holy hour, church, and the temple, but this of all things should bring us back to God—our father, creator, and savior. When the storm passes many of us would have lost a loved one, or had death itself brush our cheeks, and it’s so hard to move on from that. It’s terrifying and shakes your body to every last bone, not being able to see your loved one as they struggle to breathe their last breath alone in a hospital room, is such a horrible thing to go through in *any* circumstances, losing a loved one is hard. But these are the times that we need to be reminded that we are not alone, we are going through this together; No matter our race, gender, background, or citizenship status, because in the end

we are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, *human*, and we will overcome it with God's love. Following the instruction from Pope Francis, have faith and patience, *hang* on to God, because we will overcome this. The temple may be closed for precaution, but God is with us. Let God bless us, help us, protect us, and establish peace in our hearts and society again.

Vivian from Guatemala, and her daughter Amy who was born in the US – both currently living in Worthington, MN.



And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He *began* to say, “Blessed *are you who are poor*, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are you who hunger now*, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed *are you who weep now*, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who

are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe *to you* who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe *to you* when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.” Luke 6:20-26

I am not an immigrant, but I am writing this because I feel deep connections with my immigrant brothers and sisters. I am the descendant of immigrants, and as a child, I often sat at the knee of my grandfather and listened to the stories he told of my immigrant ancestors and all the difficulties that they faced with great faith. This is not my story I share, but an important reflection that was shared with me by another, something that has changed my worldview.

I’ve been blessed to have visited Guatemala a number of times, and have gotten to know the families there of some of our Guatemalan immigrants in Worthington. One day several years ago, we were visiting the sister of a woman who has lived in Worthington for about 20 years now. We were in the highland mountain town of Ixchiguan. Evelyn had just served us a nice chicken dinner, and I was aware of the fact that this was something they didn’t have often (the poor in Guatemala eat mostly beans, rice and tortillas, seldom do they have meat). But it didn’t really hit me until Evelyn shared what was on her heart. She has a number of relatives that have come to the United States including some of her own children. I will paraphrase what she said for you, but please keep in mind that she spoke with a gentle voice, there was no malice or bitterness in her words, only the truth. Those of us who listened Evelyn’s reflection were profoundly moved by her words. This is what she shared:

“When you (she was speaking generally of American visitors to Guatemala) come here, you come on airplanes, and you are clean and you smell good, and have money to spend. We try to welcome you, because we believe we should welcome the stranger who comes to us. This is what Jesus taught us. So we invite you to our humble and poor homes, and we feed you food that we cannot afford to give our own children. You are happy and healthy, and we thank God for sending you to us.”

“But when we go to your country, it is very different for us. We have to walk for weeks, and cross a desert. The journey is dangerous and difficult. Many people die along the way. We get to your country, and we have to sneak in. We are not welcomed. When we arrive there we are dirty, and we have nothing but the clothes we wear. We have spent everything we have to get there and gone into debt, so that we can try to feed our starving families. If we manage to stay, we must live in secret. We take any job and are grateful for it, and we do work that is very hard and dirty. But we give thanks to God, because we can make enough money to send back to our families so that they don’t starve. And we are grateful to God that we lived to make it. Yet always we are afraid that we will be found and sent back, and that our poverty will be even worse.”

In conclusion, in great humility with no malice or anger this woman simply said:

“And that is why the poor will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Evelyn shared these thoughts in a time that seems very different now. How much our lives have changed in a few months. In these days of the Coronavirus, we are all facing concerns about what lies ahead, and perhaps we think that we will soon identify as those described by Jesus in these verses from the Gospel of Luke. Most of us will confront challenges we have never before had to face. But in these times, let us also remember the immigrants among us and those who are already living in poverty. Remember that many people are working jobs that will not allow them to quarantine themselves, will not qualify for government aid, and may not have health care. They are the poor among us in these days when we all face difficulties. Let us remember to pray for one another and share the love of Christ in any way that we can.

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