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Archdiocesan pastoral staff, Advent Day of Reflection, January 16, 2009

Mary McCauley

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Archdiocesan Pastoral Staff
Advent Day of Reflection
January 16, 2009

I am aware that as members of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center you chose **HOPE** for the focus of your Advent Journey. I am also aware that you were asked to take a lead from the *Good Morning American Weekend Edition* of describing your week in three words, but rather than describing your week in three words you created three word messages of **HOPE**. **(I am also aware that Advent is over and we continue to HOPE in ordinary time. This is good!)**

Knowing your Advent focus and my assignment I reflected on the Postville Story in light of the question...*What gave and continues to give our immigrants hope?* Or another way to pose the question would be to ask: *How do our immigrants remain hopeful in light of such devastating and discouraging experiences?*

Needless to say in preparation for this sharing I had to do a bit of reading and reflection on the virtue of **HOPE**. In so doing I came across three phrases ...each being pretty close to the three word *Good Morning America* guideline....not quite but pretty close...so my plan is to weave these three phrases into the **Postville Story** and at the same time attempt to respond to the common question...**What gives our people HOPE?**

Now you are probably wondering....what are the three phrases? The first one was the headline used by Tony Leys who authored a special section on the *Postville – Guatemalan Connection* in the November 30th edition of the **Des Moines Register**. The headline was **Hope At Any Cost...**

The second phrase comes from a Book entitled, *Thoughts of a Blind Beggar* by Gerard Straub and it is...**Hope is the Fruit of Charity**. And the third phrase comes from Karl Rahner, SJ, a German theologian. It is **Hope Hopes God**. Believe me I am not a theologian and I do not pretend to understand all that Karl Rahner writes, but once in a while I come across some of his material that really speaks to my heart. This three word phrase did just that...**Hope Hopes God**.

For me these three phrases...**Hope at Any Cost...Hope is the Fruit of Charity.....and Hope Hopes God** contain the seeds for what gave and continues to give **hope** to our Mexican and Guatemala immigrants.

Let's look at the first phrase...**Hope At Any Cost**. Why do people risk their lives in order to come to the United States? *Why did our ancestors come?* Why did our people in Postville endure such injustices and exploitation at Agriprocessors? Why do people continue to come when they know that others have been arrested or even died in the coming?

Being aware of the many challenges our people faced in coming to Postville I would often ask the question...*(of course I always had to use an interpreter so I made my questions simple...)* I would ask...Why did you come? My friends would look at me... smile...and respond with a few short words, such as, **My family....My children...No food...No money...No work...We were hungry.** Truly it was a case of **Hope at any Cost!**

In a text entitled *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, the author Father Daniel Groody, CSC quotes a father as saying, *“I left a wife and three kids at home not because I wanted to get rich but because I wanted to survive. When we got to the point where we did not have enough to buy even the necessary things like tortillas, eggs and sugar....I had to immigrate.”* It was **Hope At Any Cost!**

The same author talks about Juan, who says, *“The most painful thing is leaving the family behind especially the children, but we do it in the hope that someday we will have something in Mexico.”* This is **Hope at Any Cost!**

Then there is Maria....a young woman from Mexico, who came to Postville about three years ago.....At the age of three she was abandoned in the streets of Mexico City. The streets became her home. When I asked her why she came she said, *“I had no family, no work, no money and no home. I had to come.”* It was **Hope at Any Cost!**

Also described in the text, **Border of Death, Valley of Life**, a young woman named Julie states: *“We are aware of the dangers but our need is greater. There is always the risk of dying in the desert but the desire to survive and keep going is even more important. It’s a gamble.”*

And Tony Leys in the special section on the *“Postville – Guatemalan Connection”* says this: *“Iowa was a gamble that hundreds of Guatemalans lost. But life at home is so bleak more will leave despite the risk.”*

Another person that Tony Leys refers to his article states this: *Some people in the United States who are fed up with illegal immigration want to build a fence all the way along our Southern borders. In response to this idea this person declares: “If the government is planning to build a wall they’d better build it up to the sky. Otherwise people will get over it. They can deport one million but three million more will come.”* Why? Because it is **Hope at Any Cost!**

I would now like to tell you about **“Gloria”**, a woman from Mexico, who resides in Postville. She is tall and dignified. She walks the streets of Postville with a monitoring device on her ankle. She also walks the streets with pain and anger in her heart. Her anger stems from the labor law abuses, injustices and sexual harassment that she and others allege they experienced while working at Agriprocessors.

On July 26, the day that three United States Congresspersons came to Postville to listen to the testimony of our people she spoke spontaneously. I had seen her early in the morning in Church in front of an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe ...tears streaming down her face. At that moment I knew I was looking at a woman filled with anguish, in intense pain and with intense courage.

Within an hour or two that pain, anguish and courage would turn to words and shouts of honest anger...as she vividly described the alleged abuses that our people, especially the women and the minors, endured while working at Agriprocessors. She reminded me of the story of Hannah in the Old Testament who poured out her heart to her God and to her people. Just as Hannah's prayer was prompted by her deep sorrow and misery, I believe that "**Gloria's**" plea was prompted by the hurt, the pain, the humiliation and shattered dreams experienced by so many in Postville. She was not speaking just for herself...she was speaking for an entire community. She was speaking for all those who had come to Postville with the hope of a better future. They knew they had come without the proper documentation...but for survival they did not know what else to do. She was representing people who were desperate. Their desperation had turned to **hope...Hope At Any Cost.**

I have another story about a man in a Florida jail, **Jose**. **Jose** was from Guatemala. He had come to Postville so that he could send money back to his wife and children who had remained in Guatemala. He did this faithfully every single month.

Naturally when he was arrested and jailed he was no longer able to support his family. Finally toward the end of his jail sentence he was able to talk to his wife in Guatemala. His wife told him that she did not have any money and his children were hungry. According to the interviewer this is the advice he gave his wife... "***Sell whatever we have in order to feed the children.***" This is **Hope At Any Cost** and for Jose and his family it turned out to bea dreadful cost!

Cardinal Roger Mahoney in his address to the National Migration Conference in July 2008 described **the act of migration** as "***an act of hope, believing that a better life, more befitting of human dignity is possible for the migrant and his family.***" For me the act of migration is a step by step process to move on despite adversity. It is a trust that with the help of others and with the help of God they will survive. Migration in and of itself witnesses to **Hope At Any Cost!**

And this takes us to our second phrase: **Hope is the Fruit of Charity.** I am firmly convinced that our people in Postville survived the immigration raid on May 12, 2008 and all of its aftermath because of the [love given and received by innumerable people and because of the love they have for their family.](#)

Hope, that spirit that gives all of us the courage to move on or to take another step despite adversity comes to us because of **love**...possibly it is love of self or love of others or love extended to us from another ...whatever form it takes I agree with Gerard Straub in the text, *Thoughts of a Blind Beggar*, who says that **Hope is the Fruit of Charity.** It is love that gives us hope and having a sense of hope, we are moved to action. **Hope At Any Cost.**

Again Fr. Groody in the text referred to before, *Border of Death...Valley of Life*...makes this statement about immigration: “*Immigrants are willing to descend into the depths of hell in the desert for the people they love so that they may have better lives.*” **Hope is the fruit of charity.** People risk their life because they **love.**

One woman in Postville who was arrested on the day of the raid and then released with an ankle bracelet to care for her family told the story of her little daughter who looked at her leg and asked, “*Mommy, what did you do?*” No mother should have to look her child in the eye and try to explain to her that her mother and father loved her so much...that they came to the United States, **yes without the proper papers**, but because they felt they had no other choice and they wanted her to have a better future. And now because of that act...because of their love...her mother is being treated as a criminal. **People hope ...people risk their lives.... because they love. Hope is the Fruit of Charity.**

Here are some of the **signs of love** that I witnessed in Postville giving **HOPE to our people.**

- First of all there was the open door at St. Bridget’s...a door that had been open and welcoming for many years. Our Hispanic brothers and sisters knew they could come to St. Bridget’s for any need. They knew they would be respected and loved. They trusted our Hispanic Minister, Paul Rael. Their trust in Paul was verified by Irma. Irma was working at the plant on the day of the raid....[she heard the words...La Migra...La Migra, Migration...save your self if you can.](#) She had only one thought, her children. She grabbed her cell phone called Paul and simply said, “*Pablo, take care of my children...*”
- Another tremendous sign of love was the sight of so many people on the evening of May 12, 2008, donating food, clothing, tooth brushes, blankets, cots etc.

There were many other signs of love

- It was the presence of lawyers, counselors, medical personnel
- It was the presence of you, Archbishop Hanus, during the week of the raid and for our walk and rally on July 27

- It was the presence of you, Judy, and other Hispanic Ministers
- It was the presence of Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner from Guatemala who came to listen to their story and to stand in solidarity with her people. She described our women as *double time victims* for the reason that they had to leave Guatemala and then for the way they were treated at Agriprocessors and by ICE officials.
- It was the presence of three Congresspersons on July 26 who came to listen and learn and hopefully respond with legislative action
- It was the presence of personnel from Catholic Charities (Joe, Lori, Carol) Luther College and Lutheran Services.
- It was the ability for our Hispanic men and women to have their bills paid each week because of the generosity of hundreds of people from across the nation who obviously loved them and were concerned about them...
- It was the march and prayer held in Waterloo on May 18 and the Prayer and Rally in Postville on July 27.
- It was the sight of journalists on a daily basis respecting their privacy but at the same time wanting to share their story with the broader public.
- It was the assurance given by many that through letter writing campaigns they would be doing what they could to bring about immigration reform.
- It was and continues to be ...the day in ... day out...exhausting work of Paul Rael, our Hispanic Minister and Father Paul Ouderkirk, Violeta Aleman that says to them...*We love you...You are important...We are here to help...*

It was...and I could go on and on.... I simply believe it was the sincere love, encouragement, assistance and the sense of justice of hundreds of people for our hurting brothers and sisters that gave and continues to give them **HOPE**.

Fr. Virgilio Elizondo in his introduction to the text I have referred to so often states, “*love has a spiritual power that liberates and changes people.*” How true! So to all of you I say, “*Never miss an opportunity to love for it might be your one small sign of love that will give another HOPE!*” **Hope is the Fruit of Charity!**

Now to our third phrase....**Hope Hopes God!** What did Karl Rahner, SJ mean and how do I see these words being lived by our Hispanic Brothers and Sisters in Postville?

Karl Rahner,SJ makes it quite clear that he is not saying to **hope in God** or to **hope for God**...but rather he declares **Hope Hopes God**. Now here is the Mary McCauley interpretation of this thought....to have hope is to have God. To hope is to hope God! Hope is God!

To put this into the lives of our Postville people I want to tell you about Emilisa and Francisco Monzon....Francisco, a nineteen year old boy came to Postville about two years ago...his sister Emy followed last year. Their older sister is in a convent in Guatemala City and their father, a very poor farmer, remains in Guatemala longing for

the day when his family will be reunited. In the Des Moines Register article that I referred to earlier, there is a picture of Emy and her father. And on the web site of the Des Moines Register you can find Emy greeting her father and her father greeting her. This is what Emy says to her father....

I hope to see you again in five years and I hope to find you with open arms awaiting my arrival. I love you lots. You are always in my heart; I hope you pray for me and all the people here. .

Her father, Carlos, offers this greeting....

Emy, I miss you and Francisco. I have always asked God to protect you. I hope you are doing well and I hope in a short time we will be together again. Greetings to all who have helped us out.

Emy is terrified yet she and her brother want to remain in Postville for another five years so they can continue to send money back to their family. Emy hopes ...her brother hopes.... and their father hopes. Hope sustains them when there appears to be nothing elsefor **Hope Hopes God!**

And now just one more story! It is the story of Je sus. The first day I met Je sus was the day that Rigoberta Menchu visited Postville. He was going to offer a testimony to Rigoberta describing his experience of the raid and then his five months in jail. His story was difficult to listen to for he spoke of the harsh treatment he received from the ICE officials...of how he was kicked to the ground and beaten...of how they were often called rats...made fun of, shackled and searched, the latter causing great humiliation every time he was moved from one jail to another and for Je sus this happened about four or five times.

He described the anguish in his heart when he feared he would never again see his wife or three month old daughter. He told about being in solitary confinement for ten to twelve days. He told about sharing a jail cell with hardened criminals, with murderers, burglars, rapists. He found this very hard for he knew that the only crime he ever committed was to work without proper documentation. **The crime he committed was to work. He loved his wife and his daughter so much that he was willing to risk his life so his wife and child could have a better future.**

Following his testimony I asked him...*once again with the aid of an interpreter.....What gave you hope during your five months in prison?* Je ...sus pondered my question. At first he was silent, then he looked down ... then he looked up. He spoke one word.....**DIOS!** I did not need a translator for this response. I knew from his word. I knew from the movement of his head what gave him hope. **GOD!** Je sus explained the three words of Karl Rahner better than Karl Rahner could ever explain them to me. **Hope Hopes God! Hope is God!** The gift of hope is the power, the presence and the love of God at work within us. It is that gift that helps, not only our immigrants, but all of us, to face insurmountable obstacles.

I would like to close with one more quote from the text *Border of Death, Valley of Life*. It comes from the introduction by Father Viriglio Elizondo. In the introduction to this significant work he states:

In the voice of the wounded stranger we hear the voice of God.....

I heard the voice of God in the voices of the wounded people of Postville....I heard the voice of God in my friend **Pedro** who said to me, "*Sister Mary, I am so sad ...so sad because they have taken away my mother.*" I also heard the voice of God when Pedro in his testimony to Rogoberta Menchu, when he described the day of the raid with these words:

"That day scarred my heart forever!"

I saw the face of God in the 42 women who during the summer walked the streets of Postville with GPS devices on their ankles. I saw the signs they carried in our rallies that read: *We are Not criminals... We came to Work. We came to feed our families. We are mothers.*

I heard the voice of God in the anger of **Gloria** who talked about the forms of abuse she and many others experienced while working at Agriprocessors.

And I heard the voice of God in **Je sus** when he talked about his days in solitary confinement and how terrible it was to be separated from his wife and three month old daughter....

Because I had the privilege of walking with these wounded people...they are no longer strangers...they are friends. My hope is thismay you in some way have the same privilege I have had and **may the voice of the wounded stranger soon become your wounded friend.**

Finally I have to tell you that **I saw the face and heard the voice of God when we would be saying good bye to group being deported.** I knew their storiesI knew their heartache....I knew how they had been treated at Agriprocessors and how they had been treated by ICE officials. I would look at them, hug them and say...."*I am so sorry for what has happened to you. I am so sorry for the way our country has treated you....*" They would look at me and say, "*It's ok...we understand!*" **But I say, it's not ok. And I do not understand!**

And so this morning I ask you to join me in a campaign for **Hope...**let us do all that we can to give to our 21st century immigrants **Hope... Hope at any cost!**

How can this be done? First and foremost we need to continue to be present to our people, offering love. We need to become their friends.

Then we need to extend that love into the political arena. We need to engage in social and political action that will help to bring about immigration reform. I urge you to write to your Congresspersons requesting that comprehensive immigration reform be a part of the 2009 legislative agenda. Call for an end to raids. Call for family unity. Call for just labor practices. **What we need is reform not raids.**

In addition we need to become familiar with the complexity of the documentation process and have an awareness of how our economic and political policies of the past and present have often jeopardized the lives of many of our people.

As challenging and at times discouraging as this political activity might be [I continue to hope and I continue to pray](#). I ask that my hope become your hope and my prayer become your prayer. [This is my hope...this is my prayer.](#)

- **May the memory of Postville never leave our hearts.**
- **May it lead to love.**
- **May it lead to justice.**
- **May it be the impetus for a change to our broken immigration system so that those who desire to call America home may be welcomed. Then may they, just like our ancestors, [possess abundant hope.....](#)**

[A hope that is the fruit of our charity.....](#)

[A hope that leads to justice](#)

[A hope that hopes God!](#)

Thank you

Mary McCauley, BVM

January 16, 2009