

How we treat them is how we treat Him

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Even the name itself, “Children’s Hospital,” seems strange. To visit my infant grandson, suffering from respiratory distress, I was required to stop at the desk in the lobby. I’d been to the hospital five months previously for his birth, so my documents were on file. I showed my driver’s license and the clerk scanned through a number of Mary Harts before my photo appeared. My visitor’s badge printed, I took the elevator to the sixth floor. Exiting the elevator, I was blocked by locked entry doors. Following the notice to pick up the telephone on the wall, I was expecting to explain my purpose, but instead, the doors buzzed open. Precautions were in place, but I was not prohibited entry.

Walking onto the floor, I saw pedal-riding toys parked in a row next to the nurse’s station.

When I entered my grandson’s room, his exhausted mother, my daughter, was nursing him. He lay across her lap, wrapped in tubes, a tiny oxygen cannula extending from his nostrils. Suffering from a respiratory virus he’d likely caught from his older siblings, my grandson needed help to breathe until his lungs returned to health. He’d been admitted to the hospital that morning.

Once he’d fallen asleep, I offered to hold him while my daughter took a shower. So she gently passed him over to me, and I cradled him in the darkened room. In the dim light, he looked sick and pale, unlike the rosy round-faced baby I was accustomed to. My heart ached for him that he should have to be in a hospital, innocent that he is. Yet I knew that everything could be much worse. We were confident he would be released soon and return to health.

As I held him, looking down at his precious face, I felt my heart surge with sorrow for mothers, fathers, and grandparents who love their children as much as I love this one and whose children are as innocent and helpless as my grandchildren. And I knew that, just as I would do anything for my own, they are seeking life and safety for their own.

And as strange and sad as I felt entering a Children’s Hospital, these families were forced into drastic measures, measures that I cannot begin to imagine, to save their children and protect them from threats I can only read about. They were crossing seas and walking long distances. They

were living in terrible conditions, waiting for help. Their survival, the survival of their children, depends upon the mercy of strangers. Many die.

Imagine if my grandson had been turned away from the hospital. Imagine if he was refused medical care. Imagine if his life hung in the balance by the decision of a government.

Reading about refugees and immigrants being refused entry into my country is heart-breaking, but imagining myself in their place, as I was given the grace to do while holding my sick grandson, forces me to action.

As a Christian, I cannot accept or justify the immigration ban the Trump administration attempted to impose upon innocent, suffering people. As I write this, we are awaiting the decision of the court of appeals. My prayer is that the court will rule against the ban.

I am heartened by the response of the Catholic Bishops and leaders, including Pope Francis, who have spoken out on behalf of the 65 million people around the world who are forcibly displaced from their homes. They deserve our mercy and compassion, never rejection.

This mercy and compassion should be extended to immigrants from the seven countries identified in the President's executive order. Immigration from those countries has never produced a terrorist attack on our soil.

While a few non-fatal attacks originated from two of the seven countries on the banned lists, the vast majority of terrorism incidents since 2001 were perpetrated by citizens and permanent residents. A Cato Institute study determined that Americans are "253 times more likely to die in a regular homicide than in a terrorist attack committed by a foreigner in the US." (Source BBC News report "US Travel ban: Why These Seven Countries?" by Jack Goodman, Jan. 30, 2017)

Christians should have no tolerance for this. I love my country, and I am ashamed by this executive action. This immigration ban fans the flame of terrorism because it confirms the terrorists' message that the United States is mistreating the Muslim people.

From the Hebrew Scriptures through to the New Testament, our obligation to welcome the stranger is made clear. Deuteronomy 10:16-19 reads, "Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more. For the Lord your God is God supreme, the great, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Americans who support refusing entry to refugees and immigrants have "thickened their hearts and stiffened their necks." They have allowed fear and self-interest to overshadow love and mercy.

It may seem a leap to hold my sick grandson in an American hospital and imagine the pain of refugee and immigrant families. Yet perhaps the connection I felt was a direct result of my familiarity with these words of Jesus: “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”

All who are vulnerable, whether a five-month old American baby or a Syrian toddler or a young man running for his life, are the least among us, Jesus. How we treat them is how we treat him.