

Transcript of Part 5

Signs of Hope

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by

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So the all-American credo that we "pull up our boot straps and make our own fate" is as entrenched as it is incompatible with a solidaristic idea that we share each other's fate. A culture in which good fences make good neighbors, either due to isolationist fears or on our campuses to intellectual weariness, significantly hinders deliberate engagement about common goods. Where fear of the other, again, is easy to replicate or a mass market, I think understanding across difference can be harder to come by and engender.

So I just want to close with a couple of signs of hope in that regard. First, Pope Francis's ongoing witness to encounter and solidarity. Beyond his powerful personal witness returning from Lesbos with refugee families or washing the feet of Muslim, Hindu, and Copt refugees on Holy Thursday, in his historic address to the U.S. Congress, Pope Francis talked about immigration here in our own national context.

And he summoned listeners to something far less radical than kinship. He did not ask my advice. He talked about the Golden Rule, if you remember, right. He identified as a fellow descendant of immigrants from a shared content, and asked us to identify with the needs and dreams propelling immigrants traveling north. And with characteristic directness, he asked, "In a word, if we want security, let us give security. If we want life, let us give life. If we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities." I think his abiding solidarity with immigrants and unwavering attention to these ideologies that inhibit our kinship offer us a way forward.

I would also say his dialogue with what he calls the "existential extremities" are a good model. He really prefers bridges to walls. But he's also talked a lot about a self-referential Church giving way to a street-bound Church. He's less risk averse. And I think talking about immigration ethics is fraught with risks. You can take my word for it. It risks making conversation partners uncomfortable, whether in terms of racial dimensions of inhospitality, naming sin, disrupting privilege. But I think he's really concerned that we not get preoccupied with safeguarding against risk. I think some of his appointees have also been prophetic on this issue, whether Bishop McElroy insisting we must all be disruptors at the U.S. regional World Meeting of Popular Movements last February, or Cardinal Tobin accompanying a New Jersey grandfather to his ICE hearing last March.

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We might also think just of religious institutions offering sanctuary, whether in their educational settings or in their parish halls. So pursuing the common good, I think, entails illuminating these structures that harm and these internalized ideologies that conceal. But it's not just fake news, but distorting echo chambers or our segmented social media feeds that complicate this task. Because I think beyond manipulative narratives, a sense of real and perceived loss and accompanying grief and resentment foster receptivity to this exclusionary rhetoric and measures.

So I think addressing not just nativism or debating rhetoric, debasing rhetoric, but also deeply-seated fears has to be part of our path forward. And there goes the neighborhood. Ali Noorani captures the unexpected nature of the challenge immigrant activists faced in recent legislative battles. Most waged a political battle, attempting to change minds with data and neglected to appreciate that the country was having a cultural debate about identity and values.

I was struck reading his book recently that this first-generation Pakistani-American raised in Santa Cruz and admittedly not very religious, perhaps models this culture of encounter in some of his efforts and response. He goes and he meets with peach farmers in South Carolina, sheriffs in Utah, Texas businessmen, seeking to forge common ground. And he writes, "we need to be able to meet people where they are, but not leave them there."

I think given the deepening tribalization of partisanship, the need to rebuild public trust, and a shared sense of community, cannot be underestimated or bypassed. But finally, I think being prophetic in today's culture might simply entail the risk of sharing our stories and speaking out. So I'd like to offer testimony from a recent graduate of my former university, Jose Arreola, who spoke out on Public Radio a few summers ago.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

Jose Arreola:

"We had to decide whether we were going north or south to get into California. My friend decided it would be best to go south to avoid the big snowstorm up north. But south would take us through Arizona. I really, really didn't want to go through Arizona. I got more and more nervous. I felt paralyzed. My friend kept asking me what my problem was. And finally I told him. I'm undocumented. I came to the United States when I was three with my family. And Arizona had just passed a law that gave police officers the authority to check people's immigration status. If we got stopped in Arizona, I could be detained and deported.

My friend is white. He comes from a really privileged, upper-class background. He attended a private high school, then Santa Clara University with me. I went on scholarship. Politically, he sees things a little differently than I do. We've had our disagreements. He was quiet for a while. Then he barraged me with questions. I answered the best I could. Silence again. Then he told me about his grandfather. How he hadn't been able to find work in Ireland so he decided to hop on a fishing boat and get off in New York. He worked as a janitor without citizenship. Now his son, my friend's father, is a high-ranking bank executive.

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The whole time through Arizona, my friend drove, like, 50 miles an hour. He didn't even want to change lanes. He told me he wasn't going to lose his best friend. He wasn't going to let that happen. The immigration debate became real to my friend in the car that day. We had a very different conversation than the one politicians are having right now. The minute actual undocumented immigrants are included, the conversation always changes. Now I'm completely open about my status. I'm still afraid, conversations don't always go well, and it's always a risk. But as long as I remain in the shadows, I will never really get to know you. And you will never really know me. With a perspective, this is Jose Arreola.