

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It was on October 2, 2023, and as I was working in the open-door church garage that afternoon, I met a caravan of three Venezuelan mothers with infants in baby carriages. They approached me, suddenly and unexpectedly, and asked for water and food, thus the reality of our current immigration situation had come to me directly and presented itself to our church community.

I did get them water and food eventually, and even found some blankets to give to them as they were in a shelter nearby without these necessities. I not only gave them these items to nourish them physically but also I brought them to our beautiful church to pray and ask for God's blessings.

There the backdrop of our church stood out, our colorful stain-glass windows of the Hungarian saints placed there by our faithful close to a half-century ago. The first window on the right side as one enters the church is of

St. Elizabeth of Hungary who was known to feed the poor with bread.

It reminds me of what Pope Francis said in his address at St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church (Budapest) on 29 April 2023. The Holy Father stated "those in need—let us never forget—are at the heart of the gospel, for Jesus came among us to 'to bring glad tidings to the poor (Lk 4:18).' " Opening the doors of our church to our Venezuelan brothers and sisters as I did that afternoon helped me to move beyond inner tranquility and complacency as the Pope challenges us to do in his 29 April meditation on St. Elizabeth of Hungary. In my belief, heeding such advice would radically change the world for the better. According to Pope Francis, the poor present a great challenge to us to speak a "language of charity," and to carry it out in deeds like St. Elizabeth did in feeding them.

Unfortunately there will be no glad tidings in Bethlehem this year with the conflict raging in the Middle East, and according to West Bank leader Munther Isaac, neither will there be "lights nor decorating—nothing—no one is in the mood to celebrate."

Perhaps this year's Christmas feast calls us to somber meditation on the true meaning of the Incarnation, Christ's birth given our current predicaments at home and abroad.

In Pope Francis' reflection on the Nativity (*Admirabile Signum*, 2019), it is highlighted that since the time of the creation of the Nativity scene, the Christian faithful have always demonstrated how Jesus was born in a simple, humble and impoverished abode, not a palace! God's son, then, Jesus

Christ, took upon poverty at his Incarnation to save humankind in love.

Whether it be an Ukrainian war refugee suffering beyond measure who is now in Hungary, away from home; or a Venezuelan family who have dangerously passed through Mexico to now be in Chicago, they challenge us as Christians to speak the language of charity and to act on it since the one we worship and adore in Bethlehem, even coming from afar, like the Three Magi, is *Christ Jesus, born in poverty*, who will eventually be uprooted because of Herod and have to flee with his parents and become refugees. We cannot be self-referential nor caught in false pieties forgetting the needs of our desperate neighbors.

And although we await the day to once again celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem with festivities and such, this year we can still do so in the quiet of our hearts, kneeling in church, thanking God for our blessings, taking nothing for granted and asking the Lord to help us to share with the needy, Right in our own neighborhoods as our St. Elizabeth of Hungary did years ago as a credit to her people and as a Catholic saint.

On behalf of St. Stephen of Hungary Mission Church in West Town, Chicago, I send my heartfelt Christmas greetings and blessings to one and all, especially members of the Hungarian community who now reside in the United States. As a community of faith, we promise to pray for you and your family members. Pray for us that we may continue the important mission that once so animated St. Elizabeth of Hungary to look after the needy whether in physical hunger, or spiritual. Sometimes, the worse poverty, is spiritual.

And if you are so moved to support our work financially, be assured that your donations will be used to serve others and help us create a family atmosphere where all are welcome.

There will be Mass on Christmas day, Monday, December 25th at 9:30AM.

Have a Blessed and Merry Christmas!

Fr. James F. Heyd - Rector, St. Stephen of Hungary Mission Church

