Blog

Migration



Sr. Norma Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, is pictured along a border wall between Texas and Mexico in late February 2018. (CNS photo/Barbara Johnston, courtesy University of Notre Dame)

Norma Pimentel

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In this Advent and Christmas season, as we reflect on the Holy Family and their hasty departure to Egypt fleeing Herod, we can look closer and see those who are fleeing from other perils.

Many of us can relate to the hasty departure of the Holy Family. Some are grappling with loneliness, isolation, fear, abandonment, family disputes, rejection. The list is long.

I think of the thousands of families migrating to the United States. Most recently on one of my daily visits to the Plaza of the Americas in Reynosa, Mexico, just across the Rio Grande, I sat down to chat with a woman and a young man who were resting on a bench located just in front of the port-a-potties. I couldn't understand how this woman and young man could sit right next to the stench. When I asked them why they did not look for another place to sit, they answered it was the only place they could sit together.

The women had a cast on one foot. She shared with me that she fractured her leg while crossing the river into the United States. As her feet sunk into the mud, she used the force of one foot to lift out her other leg, at which point she felt it pop.

To stay with the group, she struggled to cross the river as best as she could. In the end she was returned to Mexico by Border Patrol agents. It was then that she realized her leg was fractured, and she was fortunate to receive help from a medical team.

It turns out that the young man and woman were not related. They ended up together in the same group brought north by traffickers. Addison, the young man, shared how he befriended the woman, Dina. He felt compelled to be by her side like a son would be to a mother and assist her.

I can't help but see how they came to be family for each other -- a mother and son on a journey fleeing the violence and the Herods of our time.

It pains me to hear the stories of so many who are struggling. But I am continually reminded that the Lord Jesus, for whom we wait at Christmas, brings us hope. I see his hand at work in the families I meet: the mother nursing her baby son after crossing the river; the 3-year-old dancing at the Humanitarian Respite Center, bringing a smile to her father; the volunteers who give daily of themselves to offer soup and clothing. Rest assured that the Lord's light shines brightly even when we think there is only darkness.

As we journey on this Christmas pilgrimage, let us not forget that there are many in our midst who are struggling -- the elderly who live in isolation; young adults who are trying to find their purpose; young families who are trying to pass on the faith and values to their children in the midst of the pressures of our time; and the elderly who are alone.

God meets us where we are on our journey. He gives us families to walk together, to help one another, just as the young man and the woman I met in Reynosa were strangers and became a family. Who are the holy families today in your midst who need some help along the way? How have you helped someone this Christmas season?

Be alert. You may encounter a Holy Family when you least expect it, as I do daily at the border. May the Lord bless you and your family and each encounter with another this Christmas.

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Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, is executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas.