

Blog post from <http://ailaleadershipblog.org/2011/12/30/the-holy-innocents/>

By Lori Chesser, American Immigration Lawyers Association Media Committee

In the Catholic tradition, December 28 is the feast of the Holy Innocents. These are the babies that were killed by Herod's soldiers when he learned of the birth of a new "king" in Bethlehem. Jesus escaped because an angel came to Joseph in a dream telling him to flee to Egypt.

I realized hearing the story again this year that our current immigration policy has resulted in innocents paying the price for the failure of Congress to make reasonable changes in the last 20+ years.

Who are these "innocents"? They include first, the "DREAMers": Those that were brought here by their parents and have known only U.S. culture and education for most of their lives. They did nothing to create their situation and Congress will do nothing to alleviate it.

Second, the victims of human trafficking: Those who are eligible for T or U visas, but are deported because law enforcement is either unaware or unwilling to recognize their plight. While Postville is the most obvious example, countless other enforcement efforts prosecute victims.

Third, U.S. citizens living in fear of a family member's deportation: Those whose relatives cannot immigrate legally because of the outdated and arbitrarily-limited system.

Finally, the story of the Holy Innocents also sheds light on the failure to make a reasonable policy decision about those who are not "innocent" because they did make a mistake in entering or overstaying, but are otherwise fully integrated in our communities and way of life. The Holy Innocents were killed because Herod felt threatened and did not want to take time to distinguish who was the real threat. It was the ultimate "throwing the baby out with the bathwater".

Similarly, there is no doubt that some people in the U.S. unauthorized should be shown the door and not allowed to return. But many others are no threat and are instead a benefit to our society, culture and economy, not to mention humans deserving respect as such.

Although it may be hard for us in the land of plenty to imagine, we may have made the same choices given the same situation. In fact, the right to immigrate for survival was exercised by Joseph to save the baby Jesus and by the relatives of the Old Testament Joseph coming to Egypt during the great famine. It was this latter migration that eventually resulted in another slaughter of innocents by King Ramses when the Hebrews grew too numerous. Moses was spared by the quick thinking of his mother, and later led his people to freedom as chronicled in the Book of Exodus.

Members of Congress should reflect on this story too, because it shows the dire results of failing to make just policies. If you haven't read it, let's just say it didn't work out so well for the Egyptians.

No matter our beliefs and faith traditions, these stories are timeless and instructive because they communicate truths about human nature and justice. Let's help our leaders remember them.

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