

“One Border One Body: Immigration and the Eucharist”

There is much material here, look it over and choose what will be helpful for your group’s reflection

Film length: 30 minutes

Directed by award winning filmmaker John Carlos Frey and Fr. Daniel Groody, CSC from the University of Notre Dame. Spanish subtitles menu option.

Synopsis:

In the dry, rugged, and sun-scorched terrain where many immigrants lose their lives, bishops, priests and lay people come together each year to celebrate the Eucharist. Like other liturgies, they pray and worship together. Unlike other liturgies, a sixteen-foot iron fence divides this community in half, with one side in Mexico and the other in the United States. **One Border, One Body** tells the story of a ritual that unites people beyond political constructions which divide them. Amidst a desert of death and a culture of fear, the film testifies to God’s universal, undivided and unrestricted love for all people. It speaks of the gift and challenge of Christian faith and the call to feed the world’s hunger for peace, justice and reconciliation. More than just another documentary on immigration, this film is a meditation on the Kingdom of God, the globalization of solidarity and a journey of hope.

Themes to Engage Through the Film:

- *The right to emigrate and the right not to emigrate.*
- *The nature of borders – whether political, spiritual, or personal.*
- *The liturgy as a sacrament of unity, reconciliation and transformation.*
- *The understanding of what it means to be one body in Christ.*
- *The ability of goods to cross borders more easily than human beings*
- *The building up of the community into one body healed of all division*
- *The role of the Church as an agent of welcome and hospitality - a sanctuary for life.*
- *The preferential option for the poor – caring and welcoming the most vulnerable.*
- *The dignity of work and rights of workers - seeking a better life for one’s family.*
- *The nature of solidarity - recognizing we are one human family and love of neighbor*

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Background Information on the Film:

When does this liturgy take place?

The liturgy takes place on November 2. In the United States, the church celebrates All Souls. In Mexico and other Latin American Countries they celebrate the Dia de los Muertos.

The Día de los Muertos Mass

It is precisely the death penalty of the desert that is being commemorated at this Day of the Dead celebration. Like our liturgical setting, the unity and diversity are again apparent here. All Soul’s Day is a commemoration of the universal church celebrated everywhere on November 2; yet in Mexico, as in much of Latin America, its popular celebration as día de los muertos in the cemeteries and with special foods, drinks, home altars and even theatrical works and editorial cartoons, overshadows the Solemnity of All Saints and the more popular American version of Halloween with its own skeletons and skulls and night of the living dead theme. Here it is precisely the people who die enroute to the secular promised land that are being remembered and celebrated.

The Symbolism of the Border and the Backdrop

The Día de los Muertos Mass celebrated annually on the border highlights both the unity and the separation of the Church. We are obviously united in one faith and as members of a Church which claims oneness as a defining characteristic. On the United States' side of the border, mass is frequently celebrated in Spanish and bi-lingual liturgies are not unusual. On both sides of the border we find so-called "Hispanics" and so-called "Anglos", descendants of native Americans and descendants of Europeans; there is unity in the diversity of the assembly.

We use common liturgical texts, we use common symbols, the colorful decorations and grassroots music are more similar than dissimilar, the order of mass is equally predictable from either side, vestments and vessels are easily recognized by both sides, the enthusiasm and joy of the assembly is apparent on each side as is the tension provoked by the presence of media, immigration officials, helicopters overhead and others who are not exactly participants in the liturgy. Even the Cristo Rey mountain whose towering image of the Crucified Savior King forms the reredos of this liturgical space has a base that is bi-national.

--Background information provided by Fr. John Stowe, Diocese of El Paso, Texas

Liturgical Implications for Living a life of Faith

Our celebration of the Eucharist leads us to communion in both the vertical dimensions (with God) and the horizontal dimensions. As we break bread with sisters and brothers on the other side of the fence we remember that Jesus is our unity. If all that has been transformed in the eucharist are bread and wine, then we have not celebrated well have not allowed God's spirit to be at work in us. Transformed ourselves into the body of Christ we are sent into the world, *Ita missa est*, to be about transforming that world by incarnating God's word and presence. We must ask ourselves if we truly live and put into practice what we celebrate in the eucharist. Does our eucharistic celebration affect the way we think about immigration policy? Especially as our whole US Catholic experience has been one of integrating new waves of immigrants who transform the land by their labor and cultural contributions.

Bishops in the film:

Bishop Armando Javier Ochoa, Bishop of El Paso, Texas

Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles, California

Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico

Bishop Renato Ascencio Leon, Diocese of Juarez, Mexico

Auxillary Bishop Jose Guadalupe Torres, Diocese of Juarez, Mexico

Bishop Gerardo de Jesus Rojas Lopez, Diocese of Nuevo Casas Grandes, Mexico

by Sr. Katherine Feely, SND

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Background Information on the Film:

1. What images from the film were most compelling to you? What new connections did you make or insights did you gain from the film?
2. In this film, the Church has 'left the building' and brings the liturgy, a sacrament of unity and life, to a place marked by division and death – the U.S. /Mexico border. Why is the liturgy celebrated on the border? How are we called to connect what usually happens inside of church with what happens outside of it?

3. What are the U.S. and Mexican Bishops attempting to celebrate and witness through this Eucharistic liturgy on the border? What is the symbolism here? What are the similarities and differences on each side of the fence? How do we form one church despite cultural and political divides?
4. The Eucharist is a graced event that celebrates God's transformative activity in the world. How are we called as Christians to participate in that transformation and live out the action of the liturgy in our daily lives, bringing about a more just world? What are the social implications of our faith?
5. Cardinal Mahony notes that "The Church will always minister to people regardless of documents. We will always advocate to make laws more just and promote the common good." While the church is not advocating breaking the law, it is strongly critical of the failure of the current system. What is the church advocating and what are the implications for immigration policy?
6. Where should we draw the line between legitimate border control as an appropriate exercise of national sovereignty, and excessive border control that puts human life at risk and ignores human rights? What criteria should be used?
7. In the film, one of the celebrants states, "We must understand the reality of pain, suffering, fear, persecution, discrimination and separation of families our brothers and sisters are suffering today." How does the principle of solidarity call us to see the suffering imposed by a failed immigration system from a perspective that is a different point of view than that of the mainstream media?
8. As Christians, how are we being challenged to provide a countercultural Gospel witness? What are the risks? What are the rewards?
9. What deeper questions must we ask ourselves about responding to and confronting the current fear and discrimination towards people who are coming to the United States seeking a better life? Where does this fear come from? What is needed in order to dismantle such fear?
10. There is a widely held misconception that its easy to come into the United States legally. In fact there are not sufficient legal avenues to meet the present demand for the workers in the U.S. and those seeking to come legally may expect to wait up to 25 years to be reunited with family members. Why do the labels of "illegal" demean and disrespect human beings made in God's image? Why are such labels used politically? What is their effect?
11. The liturgy in the film is celebrated on November 2, the Day of the Dead, in order to remember and pray for all those who have died crossing the border. In the offertory procession, a small pair of shoes from a little child who died in the desert are brought to the altar symbolizing the hardship and death caused by immigration policies. As the number of deaths on the U.S/Mexican border continues to climb, why would people undertake such a dangerous journey when they know the possible outcome?
12. "Blessing becomes privilege becomes entitlement becomes exclusion." Discuss this statement from two perspectives, one a US citizen, two a Central American immigrant seeking employment and a better life in the US. What are the push and pull factors economically, politically and culturally?
13. Dan Groody writes, "The walls and fences we set up, which we think will protect us from outsiders, are barriers that imprison us and keep us from realizing our common interconnection with each other. The Eucharistic celebration affirms that breaking down walls and bringing together the world is already happening in the liturgy, and when the world is consummated in Christ, the reconciliation of all people will be complete. "For [Christ] is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh...(Eph 2:14)." How does the building of walls actually make the problem of immigration worse and the suffering more pronounced? Where else in history or in the world

today do we see the failure of walls? How has history judged those walls? What alternatives can provide both security and justice?

14. Where are the walls of separation in our own lives, walls that separate contemplation from action, devotion from discipleship, liturgy from justice, love of God from love of neighbor?

15. Our Church may transcend borders, but it is difficult at times for our minds and hearts to do the same. What borders must we cross in our personal lives to bring about a Kingdom vision?

16. In the early church, the “sign of peace” in the liturgy originally meant that anyone who needed any kind of reconciliation had to be reconciled with those persons in order for them to be found worthy to receive the sacrament. How and where are we called today to be reconciled with others and to be active agents of reconciliation as part of our life in the Eucharist?

17. What are the challenges to you in your families, neighborhoods and communities in terms of reconciling differences?

18. We must ask ourselves if we truly live and put into practice what we celebrate in the Eucharist. Does our eucharistic celebration affect the way we think about immigration policy? What is happening to the least of these – our brothers and sisters? What are we doing to end the suffering and restore the body of Christ?

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Scripture Passages for reflection highlighted in the film

Mark 12: 29-31

Jesus replied, “The first is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord

your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Exodus 23: 9

You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens

yourselves in the land of Egypt.

Ephesians 2:11-18

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For [Christ] is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it.

Hebrews 13:14

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come.

Philippians 3:20

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 12:2-12

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you

may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect . . . For as in one body we

have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in

Christ and individually parts of one another. . . Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is

good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.

Matthew 25: 31-46 “Who is My Neighbor?”

Handout Before the Film

Before viewing the film, take a few minutes to identify your current perspectives on immigration. Complete the questions below in the space provided.

o I assume that immigrants:

o The adjectives that I would use to describe immigrants are:

o Questions I have about immigration are:

o Describe a personal experience with immigrants:

Handout After the Film

After viewing the film, take a few minutes of silent reflection to let the images and message sink in. In the space provided record your responses.

Words or phrases that struck you:

Images and Impressions:

Reactions and Thoughts:

What new questions arose as a result of the film?

What changed or shifted as a result of viewing the film? What was reinforced?