

Scriptural reflections, linked as devotions with the suffering steps of refugees & immigrants.

Scripture: *God called out the burning bush, “Moses! Moses!” He answered, “Here I am.” God said, “Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground....I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt & have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore, I have come down to rescue them.” Exodus 3: 4-5;7-8A*

Reflection: In today’s reading from the Book of Exodus the angel of the Lord leads our ancestor Moses to “holy ground” where God speaks to him words of consolation and blessing. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the God of Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah knew well the suffering of the Israelite people. It was here on this holy mountain that our God promised to save them from affliction and to rescue them from their suffering. It was here on the mountain of our God, on this holy ground, where God commissioned Moses to accompany his people and to walk with them to freedom.

Today’s scripture reminds us that God knows well the suffering of our communities. Our God has not forgotten the despair of the mother threatened with deportation, nor the fear of the children whose father has been taken from them. God has promised to shield them from harm and to rescue them as he rescued Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. Like Moses, we have been commissioned by God to accompany our neighbors and friends threatened with separation from their families. We, too have been called to open our hearts to those in need, to create a safe space, a holy place, to shelter God’s people. By supporting those facing deportation, by offering spiritual or physical sanctuary, we share the commission of Moses to rescue God’s people.

Story: Meet Ms. Rosa Robles Loreto. Rosa has made her home in Tucson since 1999. She has been a faithful parishioner of Santa Monica Church and a valued member of her community. Her sons, Jose and Gerardo, Jr. are excellent students. Rosa helped them with their homework and volunteered at their school. Rosa worked hard to help her husband support their family—financially, emotionally, and spiritually. A licensed public accountant unable to work in her field, she did housework and catering. Rosa paid her taxes and had no criminal record.

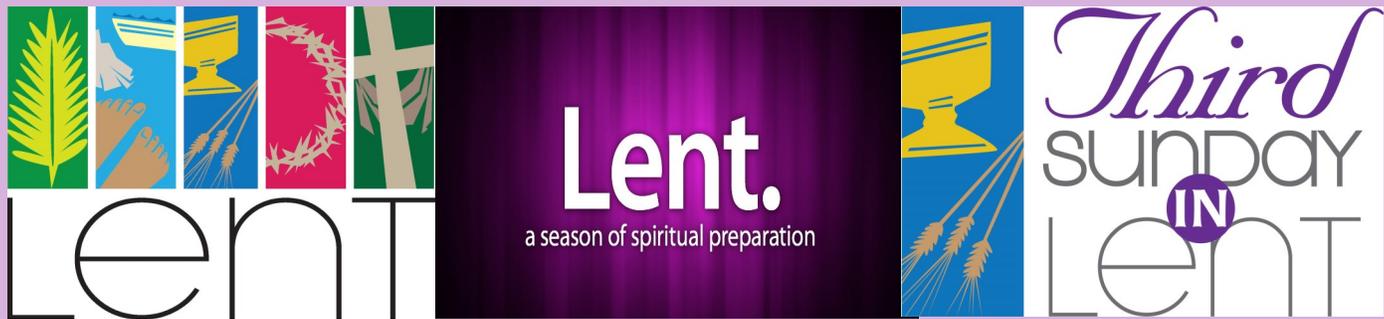
In the summer of 2014 Rosa’s life was turned upside down. She was picked up during a local traffic stop, for which she was not ticketed. She was handed over to border patrol. Rosa’s nightmare of detention and threatened deportation lasted for more than a year.



Like millions of other undocumented immigrants in the United States, Rosa's case is considered low-priority for ICE—she has no criminal history, is a caretaker for minors and has long-standing community ties. Despite all of that Rosa was placed in detention for 53 days; fought her immigration case through the courts; and was ultimately ordered deported.



(Continued on page 2.)



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Page 2

Moved by Rosa's strength and determination to keep her family together [Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson](#) offered her sanctuary. It was openness to the cry of God's people that moved Southside Presbyterian to open their hearts to Rosa, to shelter her in their sanctuary, and to surround her family with love. Rosa's story ended happily. On November 11, 2015, after 461 days of living in sanctuary, Rosa returned to her home and family no longer fearing the separation of deportation.

Read a first-person account of the experience of Southside Presbyterian Church by Stephanie Quintana-Martinez at <https://cure.mccormick.edu/?p=1515>. Learn more about Southside Presbyterian Church and pastor Reverend Alison Harrington at <http://www.southsidepresbyterian.org/sanctuary.html>. More sanctuary stories are available at: <http://sanctuary2014.org/>.

Action/Resources: As raids and deportations increase, so does the need to support our community members through the sanctuary movement. Congregations across the country are declaring the doors of the churches open to refugees escaping violence in their home countries. They are fighting to keep families together, regardless of immigration status.

Build the power to change the system and stop raids and deportations by supporting organizing and advocacy in your own area. Connect with faith-based groups in your neighborhood. Consider providing or supporting sanctuary.

For more information about how to become a safe haven, email sanctuarymvt@gmail.com, and visit Sanctuary2014.org for more information about the New Sanctuary Movement.

Also, The Interfaith Immigration Coalition has prepared a Sanctuary Movement Toolkit, at: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/resources/toolkits/>.

Prayer: God, creator and source of all things, you call us to welcome those who come to our land to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, violence, and war and to shelter and protect the sojourner among us. Help us by your grace, to banish fear from our hearts, that we may embrace each of your children as our own brothers and sisters; to welcome migrants and refugees with joy and generosity and respond with love to their needs; to realize that you call all people to your holy mountain to learn the ways of peace and justice.

We praise you and give you thanks for the family you have called together from so many people.

Amen.



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