



28 October 2020
Feast of Saints Simon & Jude

Resisting the Normalization of Indifference
A Pastoral Letter from the Most Reverend George R. Lucey, FCM, Presiding Bishop

In the name of the Father, Son +, and Holy Spirit!

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

The recent revelation that the U.S. government is unable to locate the mothers and fathers of some 545 migrant children taken from their asylum-seeking parents at the Mexican border should weigh heavily on the hearts of each American.

Yet barely a week after the story broke, the news cycle has moved on and we go about our daily lives as if these innocent children, who may never see their parents again, aren't suffering.

This sorrowful state of affairs reflects a broader cultural and spiritual malaise: the normalization of indifference. Although the Internet makes us more aware than ever before of the suffering of people around the world and in our own vicinities, we seem increasingly jaded and unresponsive to the news. After shedding a few quick and sentimental tears over the misfortunes of others we quickly resume our normal business.

It is what the Protestant theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who coined the expression "cheap grace," might've called "cheap compassion." It costs us nothing.

The indifference to suffering which is in danger of becoming endemic in our culture isn't garden-variety apathy, laziness, or inaction. It's a pernicious denial of the God-given dignity of all persons. When we remain unmoved by the misfortunes of others, we signal that we don't really see them as fellow human beings worthy of genuine compassion and love. Their suffering simply isn't worth getting worked up about, even if they happen to be 545 children victimized by institutionalized xenophobia and orphaned by bureaucratic incompetence.

But my sisters and brothers, we Christians know that our normalization of indifference is in fact spiritually and morally abnormal. The prophets of ancient Judah and Israel, our Lord in his life and teachings, the apostles and the saints, and the great councils of the Church, all remind us that we indeed are siblings to one another, that the suffering of any diminishes us all, and that as members of God's family we are called to look out for one another, not so much out of a sense of duty as from the call of love.

This is especially the case when it comes to people who come to us as refugees seeking relief from violence and poverty. As Paul VI reminded us in his *Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples*, it is “at once a duty of human solidarity and Christian charity” to treat anyone seeking asylum with “genuine and effective Christian charity and the highest spiritual values.” We have not honored this duty when it comes to the border children who have lost their parents. We have failed them, and in doing so have failed the God who loves them.

My prayer is that the good and gracious Lord who now suffers alongside those 545 frightened and grieving children will break open our hearts of flinty indifference and grant us the gift of genuinely feeling their pain and the pain of the entire world. May the God of all who suffer, of all who are lost and forlorn, and of all who feel abandoned, fill us with such compassion, willingness to sacrifice, nobility of character, and kindness that these virtues, rather than indifference, become the norms which define our culture.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Most Reverend George R. Lucey, FCM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend George R. Lucey, FCM
Presiding Bishop