

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Romans 13:8-10

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law."

Some of you probably heard about the story of the battle of Chosin Reservoir a couple months ago when I spoke about it at daily Mass. The battle of Chosin Reservoir is one of the famous battles during the Korean War. Back in June, when the president of South Korea visited the U.S., he went to the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Virginia and placed flowers down at the memorial commemorating the battle of Chosin Reservoir. What happened during this battle? The U.S. Marine Corps delayed Chinese troops from entering into the Hamhung region in North Korea for two weeks. Due to this two week blockade, the Marines bought time for the inhabitants of the region to evacuate. This is called the Hungnam Evacuation, and it is the largest U.S. military evacuation of civilians. In addition, the parents of the current president of South Korea were two of those evacuees.

According to the battle report, there was a total of 10,495 casualties, of which 4,385 were from the US Marines, 3,163 were from the US Army. The 1st Marine Division also reported 7,338 non-battle casualties due to cold weather. These soldiers courageously sacrificed themselves to save 100,000 refugees who they didn't know or with whom they had no relationship.

Besides the American soldiers, there was another hero of the Hungnam Evacuation. At the end of the evacuation, about 14,000 refugees thronged the docks of the port of Hungnam. There, there was a small freighter named Meredith Victory. It was designed to hold only 60 people and came to Hungnam to transport weapons and supplies. The captain of the Meredith Victory saw the refugees and could not ignore them. He made the decision to unload nearly all the weapons and supplies from his ship to evacuate as many refugees as possible. He was not a refugee himself and did not have to take them in, not to mention that transporting refugees would make his time at sea much more dangerous. However, the captain knew that the refugees would be killed by the communist troops if they remained in the port.

The Meredith Victory, with 14,000 refugees, headed for Busan, a South Korean port 18 hours away, traveling heavily mined water patrolled by enemy submarines. On Christmas day 1950, the Meredith Victory arrived at the port with 14,000 refugees. Not one of them died. The captain later said,

“I think often of that voyage. I think of how such a small vessel was able to hold so many persons and surmount endless perils without harm to a soul. And, as I think, the clear, unmistakable message comes to me that on that Christmastide, in the bleak and bitter waters off the shores of Korea, God's own hand was at the helm of my ship.”

The name of the captain was Leonard LaRue. Years after the evacuation, LaRue joined the Benedictines and became Brother Marinus. Marinus is a Latin name, but could also be an adjective that means “marine” or “of the sea.” How fitting.

The U.S. Marine Corps, Army, and Captain LaRue had no relationship with anybody in Korea. The only reason they sacrificed themselves and helped the Korean people was that they looked beyond their duty, and listened to the cry of the refugees, sympathized with them, and understood their difficult situation. Their sacrifices show us their love of

neighbor, their brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the Christian value of love. As someone from South Korea, I believe that the greatness of the United States of America derives from this Christian value of love, which your parents and yourselves have shown to the whole world.

A few days ago, our Bishop, Nelson Perez, released a statement addressing President Donald Trump's Sept. 5 decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. In his statement, the bishop encourages everyone to open their hearts to the needs of people, to see the opportunities, and accompany those in difficult situations. Some people might think that all undocumented immigrants should be deported since they broke the law. Yes, it could be the just and right decision according to the law. However, we Christians are called to look beyond the law. We are called to embrace all people created by God with love.

In our Second Reading today, St. Paul writes to the Romans, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law."

Many immigrants who live in the U.S have nothing in their home countries. If they are deported from the U.S., most of them would easily be exposed to criminal activity and put in danger. One of my priest friends in Painesville told me a story of a man who was deported in June and then immediately kidnapped by drug cartel. The immigration issue is a pro-life issue.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, I am not trying to convince you that illegal immigration is right or that we don't need to follow the law. May we look beyond the law. Undocumented immigrants are also our brothers and sisters who we are called to take care of. May we sympathize with them and consider their difficult situation. May we embrace them with love.

“Love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Romans 13:10)