

Morning Prayer for Encuentro
Saturday, September 22, 2018
Dallas, Texas

Good morning. I am pleased to be with you and pray with you.

Some years ago, I was on vacation with some friends. They were joined by their son, Peter, and new daughter-in-law, whom I married 3 months earlier. One day, Peter and I were standing on the lake shore, admiring his father's sailboat, which was tied to the dock. "Next year, I am going to have my own sailboat," he said.

The next year, again I am with the family on vacation and Peter and I are looking out over the same lake, and, as last year, the only sailboat at the dock was his father's. "Peter," I said, "I see you were not able to fulfill your dream of getting your own sailboat." "Yes," he said, as he looked down at his newborn son he was holding in his arms, "but what a great trade off."

The birth of a child, especially the first child, is a very unique experience for parents. Everything changes. That event gives parents an entirely new perspective about their own relationship, about reality and about what counts.

This morning, we are invited to join the prayer of Zechariah. Notice how the birth of his son, John, totally changes everything for him. He sees all of human life and history differently. He understands God in a fresh way. Having grown old, he and his wife thought God had forgotten them, that they did not count, that God was far away. The birth of his son, created a new birth, a new experience of God, who is faithful; God who is close to him; God who is merciful and tender.

There is a new birth happening in the Church of our country these days. It is a new birth that comes with the impact of the Latino experience. And like any birth, it comes with some pain. We have become too comfortable in our American culture with an approach to God that is overly rational, logical and cerebral. Yes, it is true that we have to be clear about what we believe and what we hold to be true. But, we also need to understand that faith is not only about what we hold, but Who holds us. Coming to understand that can be painful, for it forces us to grow, to stretch.

Isaiah uses the image of God cloaking us, wrapping us in a garment, to express how close and tender God is with us. It is that experience of being shrouded and enfolded by the presence of God, which the Latino people are helping all of us understand, reminding us of a Gospel truth we may have forgotten: that before we loved God, God loved us, before we chose Jesus, he chose us. The Latino experience is reminding us that faith is not only about what we hold, but Who holds us.

In my experience as a priest and bishop, I have come to appreciate that these qualities of fidelity, closeness, mercy and tenderness seem to come naturally to Latinos. So, it is not surprising to me that the first Latino pope speaks about them so often. So, my simple message to you today, is to say thanks for enriching the life of the Church in the United States with your beautiful Latino culture, your culture of warmth, hospitality, tenderness, gentleness and affection. A new birth is happening in the life of the Church because of the qualities you are bringing. Yes, it is true, like any birth, there are pains and sacrifices. But I am convinced that the Catholic Church and hopefully all the citizens of the United States will one day look back at the contribution you are making to our faith and nation and rejoice at the new

birth that has taken place. I am convinced as we think about the struggles, the sacrifices and even the pain of this new birth, that like my young friend, Peter, we will say, "what a great trade off."