

## Reflection Questions:

### The Desert as Teacher

1. Try to state in your own language the analogy Fr Flores is building between the experience of migrants coming to the US and the experience of the people of Israel. (First consult, if you need to, a Biblical commentary to get the facts about the Northern Kingdom of Israel where Hosea preached and prophesied. Then you'll be better able to work out the analogies Fr Flores is making. For example, are today's migrants to be compared to Hosea's wife—or to Hosea? Or to both? What common role does God seem to be playing in the experience of these otherwise different populations?)
2. What do you think Fr Flores means by the phrase “spirituality of the desert”?
3. When Fr Flores says, “The whole of migrant experience is a true desert. (I am not speaking in metaphors.),” why do you think he adds the parenthetical phrase?
4. The breaking-up of families which so many of the migrants among us experience is, from one point of view, a tragic reality. Yet Fr Flores' attitude towards that reality is NOT pessimistic or tragic. Why is that so? What are his reasons for hope?

### Dignity

1. Irenaeus' full original quotation in Latin is: *Gloria Dei, vivens homo. Gloria autem hominis, visio Dei.* (In English, “The glory of God is a person who is fully alive. The glory of human beings is the vision of God.”) Spend some time thinking over this famous saying by one of the greatest theologians of the early Church. What does this saying tell us about God? about ourselves?
2. Theologian Fr Jon Sobrino has paraphrased Bishop Romero's adaptation of Irenaeus in this way: “God is beside Himself with joy and is delighted when He sees these millions of human beings—impoverished, depreciated, ignored, disappeared, and murdered—breathe, eat, and dance, live with each other, lend a hand to those of us who are not poor, and pardon even those who have oppressed them for centuries. They trust God as their loving father and mother, and they are delighted that Jesus is their brother.” Again, spend some time thinking over both Bishop Romero's adaptation and Fr Sobrino's expansion of it. Do they make sense to you? Why or why not? (You might want to look up information about Bishop Romero's life and death.)
3. Fr Flores describes the migrant community as having to accept a difficult truth, the truth that “Christ's true face is not reflected in the Messiah of majesty and political might, but in the Messiah who confronts the cross.” Although both the migrant community and our own established Anglo communities might find this truth difficult to accept, our two communities would probably explain this difficulty differently. Can you see why there would be this difference?

4. Think about Fr. Flores' sentence beginning: "And when there is the possibility of finding a place, a community that allows you to welcome with honesty what is happening in your person...." Does your own church community offer such a possibility?

### **Passing beyond**

1. While this homily does not refer directly either to the migrant or to the Anglo community, it expresses nevertheless a powerful idea that is relevant to any Christian at any time. This is the idea of *metanoia*, or conversion. It is definitely worth our while to re-focus our understanding of it. The homily offers us many ways of doing that. For example, why does Fr. Flores connect metanoia with "un-learning"? Isn't that a contradiction? Since "learning" is an important value, how can its opposite—"unlearning"—be an important value too?

2. In the context of this entire series of homilies, however, this particular homily really does have relevance for the immigration issue. For example, can you see how the sentence, "An entire people has to re-root itself in order to survive," might be applied to the situation of the migrant community living among us? What factors and realities would cause the migrant community to need to do this? What deepening of their faith might be opened to them as a result?

3. Are there sentences here about metanoia that might apply to the Anglo community? Take the sentence "...Jesus both announces and makes freely possible new relations among people and a new relation with God, relations based not in the Law but in love and liberty." Could metanoia "make possible new relations" among your community and the migrant community? How might this happen? What do you think those relations would look like?

### **Standing at the Foot of the Cross**

1. Does the following statement from the homily make sense to you? "In each day's unfolding, human pain is like a teacher who shows her students how to listen to and heal their own wounds." If it doesn't, what exactly are your objections? If it does, how would you explain its meaning to a person who thought the statement absurd or at least doubtful?

2. Fr. Jesus tells us that his migrant friend was "without savings, without health insurance." (This is the norm among migrant workers, whether here legally or not.) How would you answer someone who said of this man's situation, "Well, what can he expect? He came here illegally, probably. He has no right to those benefits. It's a tough situation, I suppose, but he's just getting what he deserves."

3. Think about the statement, "There is coherency in the disciple thus schooled." Why is "pedagogical strictness" an apparently necessary step in a Christian's achieving "coherency"?

4. If you are tackling these homilies in a group setting that includes both men and women, you might see (if you dare!) what happens when the group as a whole is asked to comment on the statement, “Perhaps women’s perception of suffering and of the cross is truer than men’s.”

### **The Boldness of Migrants**

1. In his first paragraph, Fr Flores speaks of “deeper laws” governing the movement of migrants across frontiers. What “deeper laws” is he referring to? What are the laws that are *less* deep than these? What makes them less deep?

2. In his second paragraph, Fr Flores uses the phrase “preferential option for the poor.” It is a phrase often used by our popes and bishops since Vatican II. What is your own understanding of this phrase? Why has it become a central phrase in the life of our Church?

3. Fr Flores paints a dynamic picture in paragraph three of what we have been calling a “spirituality of pilgrimage.” What are the key features of the picture he is painting here? Can these features be found in your own spiritual pilgrimage? Can they be found in the spiritual pilgrimage of your faith community?

4. You might want to look some works by Jesuit Theologian Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). “The Phenomenon of Man” is his most famous book, but his “The Divine Milieu” is more accessible. How does Teilhard’s concept of the “unification of consciousness” fit with what Fr Flores is talking about here?

5. When Fr Flores refers to “the dehumanizing forces of the dominant system,” what do you think he is talking about?

### **Community (*Koinonia*) is Salvation**

1. Are you comfortable with the analogy Fr. Flores draws at the beginning between the migrants crossing our border illegally and the early Christian community? It is important to be honest in answering this question given the fact that illegal immigration has become such a polarizing topic among us in the United States. If you’re not comfortable, what exactly is the source of your discomfort? With the fact that our US immigration laws are being broken? Or with the fact that as a result of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) farmworkers from Mexico and Guatemala and even further south have had no choice but to come north in order to support their families at home?

2. Note Fr. Flores’ communal interpretation of the disciple Thomas’ conversion. Thomas’ change of heart about Jesus does not occur as an isolated revelation, but in communion with Jesus and the other disciples.” Is this a novel way for you to think about Thomas’ story? If so, do you agree with the interpretation?

3. How do you react to Fr. Flores' characterization of the "American way of life" as one based on "total self-sufficiency"? If you disagree with it, how would you explain to Fr Flores what your disagreement is based on? In what way would you say that the "American way of life" expresses the opposite values of koinonia? If you agree with his characterization, what do you think can be done to change or at least modify this individualist ethic?

4. Fr. Flores proposes the necessity of a "synthesis" between the personal and the communal. Would you agree with that proposal? Would you say that our Church at the present time not only permits but also fosters such a synthesis? In what specific ways do you see this happening?

### **Meals and Memory**

1. What do you think of Fr Flores' characterization of the "role North American culture gives to eating"? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

2. Have you ever experienced a mealtime like the one Fr Flores experienced in the fields with the migrants? If so, would you also describe your experience as one of "recognition"? Exactly how did this experience come about?

3. Can you imagine having such a mealtime experience with migrants? What do you think would have to happen in your own life for that to occur?

4. Do you agree that our Eucharists "aspire to connect us with the experience of conviviality or better yet mealtime-as-recognition"? Do you experience the Eucharists in your faith community this way? Or do you find them "ritualized" to the point where "recognition" becomes difficult? If so, what steps could you take to help these Eucharists become occasions of true conviviality?

### **The Good Shepherd**

1. "Corporate systems and the policies of powerful countries cast aside people and cultures that don't fit into their projects." How do you react to a statement like this? Does it connect with anything in your personal experience? Or do you find it offensive? If so, try to specify exactly whom or what the statement might be offending.

2. Try to put in your own words the distinction Fr Flores is making here between one kind of "knowing" and another. Which of these is Jesus' kind of "knowing"? Do you believe that Jesus makes it possible for you to "know" others as he did? Would you say that you have done your part to make that possibility a reality?

3. You may know already that Pentecostal churches throughout Latin America and here in the US have welcomed many former Latino Catholics into their ranks. Based upon what Fr Flores says about the "pastoral service of solidarity," can you see why this shift of allegiance might be happening? What do you think would attract those former

Catholics back to the Church?

4. The example of “pastoral service of solidarity” Fr Flores gives at the end (where migrants alert each other to the approach of “la migra”) is a challenging one. How would you answer someone who objected, saying, “That’s not ‘pastoral’ at all what those people are doing. It’s plain old law-breaking!”

### **Migrant Spirituality**

1. Think about what happens to the meaning of this homily if, for every place you see the word “migrant,” you substitute “pilgrim.” Begin by changing the title to “Pilgrim Spirituality.” (It may help you to recall St Augustine’s use of the word “pilgrim” in his famous statement about the Church: “The Church, like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes.”)

2. How do you understand the statement, “Life itself is your only value”? Do you take it to mean that migrants are amoral, materialistic people who care only about the next meal or the next paycheck?

3. Are you surprised to hear that to many people migrants “seem naïve, foolhardy, ignorant, rootless, without values”? Why do you suppose that people would use such terms about migrants? What are those folks missing when they talk about migrants in this way?

4. How would you explain in your own terms the apparently contradictory statement that “your own fragility...makes you free”? In what way does this idea actually form the basis of a true Christian spirituality?

### **Knowing We’re Loved**

1. What would you say to someone who objected to the statement that in order to love others we first need to know ourselves loved? (The person might object, for example, by arguing that “loving others depends on whether those others are worth loving” and that therefore “some people ought to be loved (i.e. friends, people like ourselves) while others should be rejected (ie. enemies, criminals, migrants).”

2. What difficulties, personal, social, political, stand in the way of our living and expressing *agape* as Jesus did? To what extent are we likely to be able to overcome these difficulties by our own will and effort?

3. Fr Flores’ strategy, in many of these homilies, is to treat an injustice done to migrants— here, the injustice of discrimination— as a way in which God blesses them and transforms them into a model for the rest of us. What do you think of this strategy? What would you say to someone who objected to it, saying. “Fr Flores means well, but

the whole argument falls to pieces because he ignores the obvious fact those migrants are here unjustly— illegally— in the first place”? Or to someone who objected on quite different grounds, saying, “Seeing a ‘blessing’ in an injustice sugarcoats the injustice and even ends up condoning it”?

4. Fr Flores speaks here about God as a “stranger,” as if God were himself a migrant. What is Fr Flores getting at?

### **Camouflage**

1. This is one of Fr Flores’ most challenging homilies and therefore demands careful rereading and reflection. For example, his main point— about believers’ need to “insert” themselves in the world, rather than to flee from it— challenges us. Does Fr Flores mean that we should do so because otherwise we could not protect ourselves from the world (hence the title, “camouflage”)? What does he say the positive value of such insertion is?

2. Another challenge is Fr Flores’ use of the word “syncretization” in a positive sense. Does he mean the same thing as a similar-sounding word with a definite negative connotation, “syncretism”?

3. Do you agree with Fr Flores’ comment that “the Second Vatican Council was aware that this trend [towards insertion in the world] was happening, but was neither able nor willing to draw the necessary conclusions”? Why or why not?

4. Finally, do you consider yourself (or your faith community) as a disciple (or group of disciples) in the sense in which Fr Flores uses the word in the last paragraph— that is, as a person or group dedicated to living *in* the world but not by being *of* it?

### **Following the Spirit’s Footprints**

1. Have you ever experienced the situation described at the beginning of this homily, the situation of arriving at a “border area”? Was this “border area” a place? A state of mind? A moment of conversion?

2. Fr Flores suggests that “border areas” can be scary places at times (“there is bewilderment...”). Would you agree with him? Would you also agree with him that they can also be locations prized by the Spirit? Why would the Spirit seem to be more active in “border areas” than in seemingly safer settings?

3. The early Christian communities lived with the tension between their loyalty to the memory of Jesus and their openness to the Spirit’s creativity. Do you live with this tension yourself? Does your faith community live with it?

4. Do you accept Fr Flores’ analogy between those earliest Christian communities’ openness to the Spirit and the openness of the migrant community? If you don’t accept it, what are your reasons for not doing so? If you do, what would you say to someone in

your faith community who rejected any tracing of a link between the two groups, on the grounds that the migrants are law-breakers pure and simple?

### **An Image of the Trinity**

1. *Perichoresis* is hardly a household word. We seldom hear it pronounced in Church, even on Trinity Sunday! But setting aside the strangeness of the word for a moment, what do you understand from this homily that the word is describing? Do you consider this concept that perichoresis is pointing at an important one? Why or why not?

2 According to Fr Flores, “Jesus and his disciples believed that this way of living and relating could be replicated among human beings.” Based on what you know from the Gospels (and also from St Paul’s letters) of the disciples’ relationships with each other and with those to whom they in turn preached, how well would you say that the disciples did in replicating Trinitarian relationships? What difficulties did the disciples encounter—and do we encounter—in replicating Trinitarian relationships?

3. The writer of Deuteronomy believed that God reveals himself in the journey of his people. What about your own faith community? Do you believe that God reveals himself there as well?

4. In drawing a relation between Trinitarian relationships and the relationships migrants enter into when they cross our border, Fr Flores says: “To himself [the migrant] is at the same time one and various. Something remains of his own self, but at the same time he feels the necessity of welcoming and integrating something which is not his own.” Have you read enough of these homilies to begin to grasp the point Fr Flores is making here? If not, what further information would you need to help you understand his point?

### **Bodies Delivered Over**

1. This homily succinctly presents the economic and political reasons for the presence of migrants among us. These reasons aren’t often heard on mainstream media. Why do you think that is the case?

2. Fr Flores uses the phrase “delivered over” both of Christ and of the migrants. How would you put in your own words the connection he is making here? Do you consider this a legitimate connection? Why or why not?

3. Do you agree with the following statement? “Shoppers who go to supermarkets to buy farm products never think about the bodily energy and physical wear-and-tear on the people who harvest the goods they buy.” If you agree, how would you name this attitude on the part of US shoppers? Lack of imagination? Disregard? Denial? Why do you think such an attitude has come about? If you don’t agree (if you think shoppers are aware of the huge contribution migrants make to their physical and financial wellbeing), what evidence to support your view can you point to?

4. You might suppose that the points about our treatment of migrants Fr Flores is making here would lead him to take a bitter attitude, especially in his concluding paragraph. But that is not what happens. What attitude does he actually reflect in that last paragraph? Is this an attitude you can share?

### **In the Squall's Midst**

1. Does the “paradox” that Fr Flores refers to make sense to you? the paradox that the harder we try to stamp out the spirit of evil, the deeper it digs into us, causing to panic just as the disciples did? How would you explain the paradox to someone who couldn't understand it?

2. When Fr Flores refers to the “turbulence” the migrant community must live in, what exactly is he talking about? How does the migrant community learn to live in that turbulence?

3. Does your faith community live in turbulence? If so, has your community been able to learn to live in that turbulence?

4. These homilies often contain startling reversals of “normal” expectations and evaluations. For example, migrants, normally seen as victims (or as criminals), are seen here as deeply representative of true Biblical faith. Do you find this perspective startling? Disturbing? Why?

### **A Prophet Never Has Power**

1. Consider the statement in paragraph three about the farmworker, “He knew he had not committed a crime.” Would you agree with someone who, hearing this, said, “He'd crossed the border illegally, hadn't he? The guy must be a liar or else delusional”? Why? If you'd disagree, on what grounds would you do so?

2. Try putting in your words the meaning of the following statement: “Every migrant man and woman is a living expression of a prophetic cry.” What does “prophetic” mean as it's being used here and throughout the homily?

3. What does Fr Flores mean by saying that the migrants are “freer” than the ICE official who arrests them or the judge who sentences them?

4. Fr Flores is drawing a close analogy between Jesus' prophetic identity and the migrants'. Since “analogy” means a likeness that also contains an unlikeness, what do the two prophetic identities— Jesus' and the migrants'— have in common? How are they different?

### **Both Settlers and Strangers**



1. Amos prefaces his self-description in today's reading, "I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores," with the statement that "I was no prophet." Yet Fr Flores says that Amos "rises up as a prophet." Does Fr Flores' statement contradict what Amos himself says? Or might there be different meanings of "prophet" intended here? What are these different meanings? Do these different meanings of "prophet" apply to people today? To whom might they apply? Why?

2. Italian Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, 1835-1905, called "The Migrants' Apostle," was beatified in 1997. Do Bishop Scalabrini's words make sense to you? What would you say to someone who argued, "It's a plain contradiction to say that a 'mass of failed and exploited people' could ever be 'the builders of a new society' or in fact the builders of anything!"

3. The anonymous "Letter to Diognetus" was written probably in the early third century by a Christian catechist to a pagan named Diognetus. The writer's intent was to describe the special qualities of Christianity and probably also to win the pagan over to the Christian faith. Here is the portion of the letter leading up to the line quoted by Fr Flores:

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.

The writer obviously intends to praise the way his fellow Christians live. But what about today? Would the writer recognize us, if he could witness the way Christians live today? Would he say of us that "we dwell in our own country, but simply as sojourners"?

4. Reread the last paragraph of Fr Flores' homily and notice his use of the word "security." "Security" has become a very important word in the US lately. Politicians use it constantly. We now have a "Department of Homeland Security." How is the meaning we give the word "security" like or unlike the meaning Fr Flores is giving it? Which meaning of the word do you think conforms more closely to the meaning given it in the Gospel? (You might look up the word "security" in a Gospel concordance. What do you find?)

### **In Search of a Pedagogy "From Below"**

1. Take some time to review the passage from Mark in this Sunday's reading as well as other passages showing Jesus at work teaching. Do these examples illustrate what Fr Flores means when he says that Jesus' "creativity honors the dynamic of people's lives"?

2. Fr Flores doesn't say it's wrong for Anglo pastors, staff members, and parishioners to declare that "What's necessary in migrant ministry is forming leaders from the migrant community." But he says that something else must happen first. What is it? Why would it be difficult for most Anglos to recognize the need for this step, or, even if they recognized the need, to know how to meet it?

3. How would you define what Fr Sobrino means by the "mercy principle"?

4. At the end, Fr Flores suggests that the problem of finding a "pedagogy from below" is a problem not just for the migrant community but also for the whole church. What do you think he's referring to? Do you agree with him?

### **A Boy's Initiative**

1. Fr Flores is contrasting two different ways of understanding Eucharist: Jesus' way and that of the people in the story. How would you describe this difference in your own terms?

2. What is Fr Flores' objection to those who "like to see things more pragmatically"? Do you share his objection? Why or why not?

3. Fr Flores' claims that the treatment of migrant children is an example of a much broader trend in the Church, that of postponing the challenge of the Church's youth. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

4. Fr Flores speaks strongly in favor of the emergence of a multicultural church in the US. Why would the emergence of such a church be desirable? How would you describe the forces that would oppose such a transformation?

### **Beyond Mere Pairing**

1. Do you agree that all human beings are "called to a paired relationship in communion with each other, one that suppresses neither their identity as a couple nor their individual differences?" Why is such a relationship difficult to achieve?

2. Achieving the goal of male-female communion clearly has to do with a lot more than with personal compatibility or with conformity to customs and laws. How, according to Fr Flores, did Jesus articulate for us what this "more" consists of?

3. Notice how often Fr Flores uses images in this homily that suggest motion and development: "embark on the venture," "travel a path," "dynamically unfolding," "process." Why do you suppose he uses such images? To what themes throughout these homilies do such images connect? In what way do all such images reinforce each other? Have these images as used here and throughout the homilies affected the way you look at your faith?

4. Another theme appearing here that also plays a powerful role in the other homilies is the sacramental joining of differences. In this homily the difference bridged through sacrament is difference in gender. In many other homilies (see “Image of the Trinity”) it is the difference between God and humanity. In many others (see “A Boy’s Initiative”) it is the difference between the migrant Catholic and the Anglo Catholic communities. Does the image of “pilgrimage” help you grasp the meaning of this theme? Or to put the question another way: Fr Flores assumes throughout that the meaning of the sacramental joining of differences is revealed through lived experience. Our reflection has to start with that experience rather than from abstract categories and definitions. Do you agree with his assumption? Why or why not?

### **Wealth and Pilgrimage**

1. What do you think of the statement, “the socio-economic system in which we live doesn’t let us adopt a critical attitude towards money”? Do you find yourself easily agreeing with it? Or does it elicit a strong defensive reaction? If you are reflecting on these homilies in a group setting, what varieties of reaction are people having towards this statement and others like it in this homily? How strong are these reactions? How do you—or does the group— explain their strength?

2. Did you, or members of the group, have even stronger reactions to the idea that we are “often unaware that we are enveloped in a form of life that is sustained by sophisticated mechanisms of injustice, much like the rich young man in today’s gospel”? Or to the idea that “wealth presupposes a process of possession that entails at the same time the dispossession of others”? How do you account for this greater intensity of reaction, if in fact it occurred?

3. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* say that while sin is a personal act, we commit social sin by cooperating with sin committed by others. “Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. ‘Structures of sin’ are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a ‘social sin.’” (#1869) Try putting in your own words the way in which our financial system can be seen as a “structure of sin” and in which accumulating wealth through that system can be viewed as a “social sin.” Do you agree with this way of understanding “structures of sin” and “social sin”?

4. As a pilgrim walking along with other members of the pilgrim church towards the Kingdom, how great a detriment to your “pilgrim’s progress” do you judge wealth— your own or others’ — to be?

### **Supplemental Reflections**

1. *For discussion:* These reflection-questions have referred throughout to the migrants as “them” and to the Anglo audience as “us.” What is problematic about such an approach?

What has to happen before the “we” can include both communities?

2. *For discussion:* Fr Flores uses the word “multicultural” only three times, all in the same homily, “A Boy’s Initiative.” It’s worth reflecting a little further on how to connect multiculturalism with the overall theme of these reflections, the church of pilgrimage. For example, what connection can you draw between the “multicultural church” Fr Flores is speaking approvingly of in “A Boy’s Initiative” and the “pilgrim church” held up in *Lumen gentium* as our ideal form of community? Maybe it will help to clear away misconceptions about the way Fr Flores is using “multicultural.” He is using the word not just to talk about tolerance for differences, but much more to emphasize relationships that are fundamental to our lives as Christians. What are those relationships and how are they fundamental? How does embracing these multicultural relationships enable us to become more fully what we are called to be, a “pilgrim church”?

3. During January, 2008, an Ontario County dairy farmer published a piece in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*’s “Speaking Out” section. The farmer described the crisis faced both by migrant workers, the main labor force in our New York dairy industry, and by the farmers who hire them. “Now dairy farmers live in fear of nighttime raids that leave no one to milk the cows, while workers live in fear of sudden deportation,” the writer said. The writer went on to state that comprehensive immigration legislation must be passed immediately if the dairy industry in New York State is to be saved. “A recent study by the Farm Credit Service of New York shows,” continued the writer, “that 455 New York dairy farms are at risk of losing their business if enforcement is the only tool used to deal with immigration issues....Are we willing to risk our nation’s milk supply and the industries that support it? Will we allow our dairy industry to move outside our borders where there would be food-security and safety issues?”

A few days later, someone—not identified as a farmer—wrote a reply. “I am shocked that [the farmer] would write an essay that supports making illegal immigrants legal....The next thing the essayist will want is to have illegal immigrants do our assembly jobs. No, thank you. Keep American jobs here for Americans and send the illegals back to where they came from.”

*For discussion:* Let’s suppose that both the farmer and the person who replied to him are Catholics in your own parish. Based on your reflections on Fr Flores’ homilies, what could you say to these gentlemen that would truly help them get past their disagreement?

4. The source of the Church’s understanding of itself as a “pilgrim church” is the Old Testament’s vision of the Chosen People as a migrant people. There are two points to be made here. First of all, the Chosen People saw themselves as heirs of the migrant patriarch Abraham, the “wandering Aramean (Gen 12:1-2; Deut 26:5).” Secondly, they linked their story to that of the Israelites who, freed from bondage in Egypt, had to wander forty years in the desert before reaching the Promised Land.

Theologian Jean-Pierre Ruiz explains how this understanding of themselves as migrants enabled the Chosen People, once they reached relative security in the Promised Land, to treat newer migrants humanely and justly:

The key events in the history of the Chosen People of enslavement by the Egyptians and of liberation by God led to commandments regarding strangers (Ex 23:9; Lv 19:33). Israel's conduct with the stranger is both an imitation of God and the primary, specific OT manifestation of the great commandment to love one's neighbor" For the Lord, your God, is the...Lord of Lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you, too, must befriend the alien, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt." (Dt 10:17-19), For the Israelites, these injunctions were not only personal exhortations: the welcome and care of the alien were structured into their gleaning and tithing laws (Lv 19:9-10; Dt 14:28-29) [quoted from "Abram and Sara Cross the Border," in *Border Crossings: Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*, ed. D.N.Premnath, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007.]

Theologian Justo Gonsález draws the conclusion:

The biblical tradition...reiterates that Israel not only was, but still is an 'alien' people. Solidarity with the oppressed is not only an external attitude, but the deepest reality of Israel's existence as people of Yahweh. References such as Deut. 28:8 remind Israel that it too was a *ger* (sojourner, resident alien) in Egypt, but even more relevant are others such as the one in Leviticus 25:23, where Yahweh admonishes the people: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.'" [quoted in Ruiz]

*For discussion:* Since we Christians see ourselves as heirs of both the Abrahamic tradition and the tradition of liberation enacted by the Israelites, shouldn't we see ourselves also as "sojourners, resident aliens"? Shouldn't that understanding induce us to treat the migrants among us as companions on the journey rather than as "illegals"? And shouldn't such treatment be motivated, not simply by duty or even by simple kindness, but by the desire to fulfill "the deepest reality of our existence as a people of God"?

A lot depends on your answer!