

Blessed Are the Peacemakers for They Shall Be Called Children of God

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Who is a peacemaker? Where does making of peace begin? Some go out and make war to bring peace. Others search for reconciliation between people at odds. Inwardly we must make peace with our own actions, with the actions of others, and with forces beyond ourselves. Sometimes the forces outside, or within, seem so insurmountably dark and hopeless that we give way to despair.

The teachings of the Beatitudes tell us that the peacemakers are the children of God. My experience at Esperanza has led me to encounters with young mothers who make great sacrifices and flee the dark and narrow place that promises poverty, death, or sin. They come to the United States so that their own future, and the future of their children, will be filled with good works and a spiritual life full of possibilities. They are both Madonnas and children of God wishing

BLESSED ARE THE REFUGEES

to bring peace to the world of strife into which they have been born.

These mothers radiate beauty. But not the kind Michelangelo evoked in the white marble statue of Mary in the Pieta. These women have dark, straight hair that frames their round young faces. Although often short of stature, these women, aglow with their smiles and intelligent voices, radiate responsibility, strength, and devotion. Some are very young women with sons who are just entering their teenage years. Others are grandmothers with missing teeth, unable to read in Spanish or English, pursuing their dreams so they can help their families. Their hands are roughened from years of labor in fields or in factories. These women have risked their lives to cross borders and save their loved ones. For years, they have sent home money to support their children until the danger became too great for their children and their families. Finally, the children had to leave their native countries.

I have met many such mothers from Central America in the conference rooms of Catholic Charities where I am a volunteer interpreter. The lawyers there learn the women's stories in order to petition the courts to grant them legal custody of their own children or grandchildren. With joy and pride, they have harvested food, cleaned houses, worked in restaurants, or sewn in factories to support their children because jobs, safety, and