

“...Before I built a wall...”

By Sr. Marie Chiodo, DW

“...‘Good fences make good neighbors’.
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down'...”

Robert Frost

Mending Wall (1914)



I find an invitation in Robert Frost's poem, *Mending Wall*, that challenges me to ask questions about our government's rush to expand the wall between the United States and Mexico. It seems to me that we have enough walls already built in the minds and hearts of people in regard to the migration of our sisters and brothers from the South. Those are the walls that are forging hatred, division and fear among us.

I am invited to ask myself: “Why do we hate and fear these sisters and brothers of ours?” Why do we not see that they are human beings like ourselves who are fleeing violence and oppression and seeking refuge for their families? We speak of their taking away our jobs. How many citizens are willing to work backbreaking hours bent over in the fields or in the poultry farms or sweat shops of our nation. We speak of deporting them. That would be sending them to inhumane conditions - some to certain torture or death - conditions that impelled them to make the dangerous journey to our borders in the first place. We speak of their being criminals. Those who are guilty of violent crime should indeed be subject to the laws of our land. But of the 12 million undocumented, criminals are few in number. How can I help dismantle the walls of prejudice and fear that tarnish and jeopardize the lives of immigrants who are law-abiding?

We have allowed our sisters and brothers from the South to stay in our country, many for more than thirty years. And they have served our country well- in the military, in industry and agriculture when we needed cheap labor. We have allowed them here in our towns and cities when it benefitted us. Their children have gone on to become educated and serve in government, social services, education and healthcare. Many of us count them among our neighbors, friends and family members. The advantages of their presence have far outweighed the disadvantages.

America's commitment to values of inclusion and compassion have defined our democracy and guided our approach to immigration throughout our history. Those values impel us to welcome the stranger, the needy. In the words of Emma Lazarus etched on the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Most of us would not be here today had our families not been welcomed in the past.

What we need today is not another wall, but a bridge. Bridges do not wall in or wall out. They provide a space where we can cross over into each other's lives, help each other, learn from each other and through this, bridge the gaps that prevent us from recognizing our common humanity.

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