

Tips for preaching about immigrants and immigration issues
By Denise Clapsaddle

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- The most important thing you can do is to schedule a date to preach on the topic. Don’t worry too much about what you will say. There is plenty of good material that will help you related the scripture to the circumstances in your congregation’s life and to the current world situation.
- Decide on your goal for raising the topic of immigration in your congregation. Are some members of your congregation strongly against undocumented immigrants and resistant to the idea that many are refugees? Do people in your congregation hold misconceptions about undocumented immigrants? (Example, that they don’t pay taxes or that they receive government benefits?) Be aware that a listing of facts is not necessarily persuasive, and that it may in some cases harden people in their positions. You can talk about how your own position, if different from theirs, was formed. And you can ask for them to pray for those in difficult circumstances because of our country’s shifting immigration policies. And you can ask them to listen compassionately and prayerfully to friends and family who hold different positions on issues.
- Engage members who are interested in the issue in putting together worship elements that feature the contribution of immigrants, such as songs, stories, poems, etc. The Milagro prayer charms are one way to engage church members in the lives of immigrants in a positive way. They help people to connect to a common ground that we as Christians share with many immigrants.
- Use first-person stories. The stories can be about yourself, about immigrants you have known or who have inspired you, or about a personal or family history of facing prejudice and discrimination for a reason that feels unfair to you, such as race, gender, sexual orientation or national origin. Just make sure to make it about yourself—this is what I believe/this is what I experienced. It is virtually impossible to argue with a first-person story.
- Remain mindful that change takes time. Your immediate goal in preaching about immigration in a divided congregation is to raise the issue and avoid starting an argument. You want to raise the issue calmly, introduce a spiritual element and encourage members to engage with people affected by the issue over a period of months or years. I’ve seen congregations change their positions on controversial issues, but it takes time.
- If there is a group of individuals who want to do more to help immigrants and a smaller but vocal minority who is opposed, your goal is to make them feel okay about that ministry happening in their congregation. Make it clear that you support the ministry because this is a strong theme in the Bible and a common emphasis of the church because Jesus was an immigrant, and because Christians are compassionate.

Time for Children and/or the Child in All of Us

There are Christians in every part of the world. In other parts of the world, Christians pray for their loved ones and for their joys and concerns just as we do. In some places Christians use these little prayer charms called Milagros, which is a Spanish word for miracle. These Milagros came from Mexico. People in Mexico use them as a reminder of their prayer concerns. Each charm stands for something that people pray for a lot. When you wear the charms, on a necklace or bracelet or a pin, it helps you remember all the reasons that you are praying and the people you are praying for.

America is a country with people from many parts of the world. People come here from more dangerous places seeking a safe place for their children. They come here from places with not enough good jobs seeking work to support their families and to send some of the money back home. Most of us either came here for those reasons, or our ancestors came here for those reasons. Some people think we should not accept as many immigrants, and laws were changed to make it harder for people of some nationalities, including Mexicans and other people from Central and South America and some other places like Haiti, to come and work here. When we look at the Milagros we should remember to pray for the people who want to be in America so they can have a better life for themselves and their families.

Milagros are small metal religious charms found in many areas of Latin America, especially Mexico and Peru. The word “Milagro” means “miracle”. They are also used in Europe, where they are often referred to as Exvotos (Offerings). These small charms, often depicting arms, legs, praying people, farm animals and a wide range of other subjects are typically nailed or pinned to crosses or wooden statues of various saints like the Virgin Mary or Christ, sacred objects, pinned on the clothing of saint statues, or hung with little red ribbons or threads from altars and shrines. They are also carried for protection and good luck.

Here are some typical Milagros that are commonly found, and their basic, potential meanings (always up for individual interpretation):

HEARTS, SACRED HEARTS, HEARTS WITH SWORDS Love, heart ailments, Sacred Heart of Jesus or the Sacred Heart of Mary.

EYES, DOUBLE EYES, GLASSES Santa Lucia, Eye related ailments, watching. Attach to photo of a deceased loved one, represents that person watching over you.

BODY PARTS (LUNGS, EARS, KIDNEYS, ETC) Help with a particular ailment of the identified part, or qualities associated with that part (e.g. heart-courage, arm-strength, etc.)

AUTOMOBILES, CARS & TRUCKS Travel, journey, prayers for a particular car/truck.

BOOKS, PENCILS, NOTEBOOKS Students will often use milagros of books, notepads or pencils.

PRAYING FEMALE FIGURES Prayers of/for female loved ones, a female Saint or Virgin Mary.

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ARMS Ailments of arm, strength, ability to work, embrace.

LEGS AND FEET Ailment of leg/feet or walking, journey, strength.

HOUSES Home/house, prayers for safe return.

HENS, ROOSTERS & CHICKENS Mothering/nurturing.

BULLS, COWS Strength, husbanding, protection, stamina, endurance.

HORSES Travels, journey, energy, speed.

MULES Strength, journey, persistence (stubbornness).

SHEEP, LAMBS, GOATS Lamb of God, loyalty (part of a flock).

DOGS Loyalty, protection, health/safety of pet.

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LOCK/KEY Prayers for solutions, new opportunities

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By Denise Clapsaddle

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Time for Children and/or the Child in All of Us

There are Christians in every part of the world. In other parts of the world, Christians pray for their loved ones and for their joys and concerns just as we do. In some places Christians use these little prayer charms called Milagros, which is a Spanish word for miracle. These Milagros came from Mexico. People in Mexico use them as a reminder of their prayer concerns. Each charm stands for something that people pray for a lot. When you wear the charms, on a necklace or bracelet or a pin, it helps you remember all the reasons that you are praying and the people you are praying for.

America is a country with people from many parts of the world. People come here from more dangerous places seeking a safe place for their children. They come here from places with not enough good jobs seeking work to support their families and to send some of the money back home. Most of us either came here for those reasons, or our ancestors came here for those reasons. Some people think we should not accept as many immigrants, and laws were changed to make it harder for people of some nationalities, including Mexicans and other people from Central and South America and some other places like Haiti, to come and work here. When we look at the Milagros we should remember to pray for the people who want to be in America so they can have a better life for themselves and their families.

Milagros are small metal religious charms found in many areas of Latin America, especially Mexico and Peru. The word “Milagro” means “miracle”. They are also used in Europe, where they are often referred to as Exvotos (Offerings). These small charms, often depicting arms, legs, praying people, farm animals and a wide range of other subjects are typically nailed or pinned to crosses or wooden statues of various saints like the Virgin Mary or Christ, sacred objects, pinned on the clothing of saint statues, or hung with little red ribbons or threads from altars and shrines. They are also carried for protection and good luck.

Here are some typical Milagros that are commonly found, and their basic, potential meanings (always up for individual interpretation):

HEARTS, SACRED HEARTS, HEARTS WITH SWORDS Love, heart ailments, Sacred Heart of Jesus or the Sacred Heart of Mary.

EYES, DOUBLE EYES, GLASSES Santa Lucia, Eye related ailments, watching. Attach to photo of a deceased loved one, represents that person watching over you.

BODY PARTS (LUNGS, EARS, KIDNEYS, ETC) Help with a particular ailment of the identified part, or qualities associated with that part (e.g. heart-courage, arm-strength, etc.)

AUTOMOBILES, CARS & TRUCKS Travel, journey, prayers for a particular car/truck.

BOOKS, PENCILS, NOTEBOOKS Students will often use milagros of books, notepads or pencils.

PRAYING FEMALE FIGURES Prayers of/for female loved ones, a female Saint or Virgin Mary.

PRAYING MALE FIGURES Prayers of/for male loved ones, or a male Saint.

WOMAN’S HEAD Thinking/wisdom of a woman or ailments eg. Headaches.

MAN’S HEAD Thinking/wisdom of a man or ailments eg. Headaches.

YOUNG GIRLS Female relative/loved one (daughter, grandchild, niece), innocence, prayers for motherhood.

YOUNG BOYS Male relative/loved one (son, grandchild, nephew), innocence, prayers for motherhood.

ARMS Ailments of arm, strength, ability to work, embrace.

LEGS AND FEET Ailment of leg/feet or walking, journey, strength.

HOUSES Home/house, prayers for safe return.

HENS, ROOSTERS & CHICKENS Mothering/nurturing.

BULLS, COWS Strength, husbanding, protection, stamina, endurance.

HORSES Travels, journey, energy, speed.

MULES Strength, journey, persistence (stubbornness).

SHEEP, LAMBS, GOATS Lamb of God, loyalty (part of a flock).

DOGS Loyalty, protection, health/safety of pet.

PIGS Nourishment, plenty or prayers for healing for eating disorder.

LOCK/KEY Prayers for solutions, new opportunities

MONEY Prayers for abundance.

HORSESHOE Luck.

BOTTLE Wine, Celebration, Medicine/Medical treatment.