

FRIDAY, December 2

Luke 21:1-3. *He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them."*

A while ago I watched a video about the "Jungle," a shantytown in Calais, France, built and inhabited by thousands of migrants. The video features David, a young man from Eritrea. With a hammer, a handsaw, and discarded plywood, David was building a church. "You need quality time with yourself," David says, in broken English. "Your God House can be anywhere."

I have visited many impressive churches over the years, yet none of them move me as much as the plywood structure David was building in France's poorest shantytown. Truly I tell you, this poor migrant has put in more than all of them!

Last February, French authorities took possession of and began to raze the Calais Jungle—not just the church but also the mosques, the theater, the library. I can still hear David's words floating over piles of debris and through the clouds of smoke: "Your God House can be anywhere."

PRAY for the Diocese of Karimnagar (South India)

FRIDAY, December 9

Luke 22:19. *Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

On Sundays, the priest invites the congregation to join her around the altar, and I rush to the back of the chapel to repeat the invitation aloud, in English and Spanish, "Everyone is invited to the table. Everyone!" We are all welcome—the homeless man sitting in the back row, those with canes, walkers, and wheelchairs, the shy Latino unmarried couple who came with a four-week-old baby in their arms. When we say everyone, we really mean it.

We join the prayers of the sick and the lonely, and the circle expands. We join the prayers of refugees desperately trying to reach Athens, Sweden, or Toronto, and the circle expands. We join your prayers as well. In fact we join the prayers of every person who prays.

We hold hands, say the Lord's Prayer, and share the bread and the wine. We are not just taking in the body of Christ—we are becoming the Body of Christ.

*PRAY for the Diocese of Keewatin
(Rupert's Land, Canada)*

Ps 31 * 35; Isaiah 7:10-25;
2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5; Luke 22:14-30

SATURDAY, December 17

Ember Day

Luke 3:3. [*John the Baptist*] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

When I was a missionary in Paraguay, I helped plan an adult baptism for Alberto, a member in his late forties. The church building had a large baptismal font in the back, and we planned to baptize Alberto by immersion after our Sunday morning service.

We arrived at church early and placed a garden hose into the font. We turned on the water and set about our other tasks to get ready for services. Half an hour passed, and we had only half an inch of water in the font. After an hour passed, we had only one inch. At this pace, we would never be able to fill up the font in time!

We found a powerful bathroom faucet to use for filling buckets, and we began a relay. The whole congregation formed a human chain, all the way from the bathroom sink to the font out back. It was my favorite baptism ever. Alberto wasn't baptized by just the priest—he was baptized by the collective contribution of all the faithful—and all of us there were baptized by the Holy Spirit.

PRAY for the Diocese of Kigezi (Rwanda)

Ps 55 * 138, 139:1-17(18-23);
Isaiah 10:20-27; Jude 17-25; Luke 3:1-9

SUNDAY, December 25

*The Nativity of
Our Lord Jesus Christ*

Luke 2:7. *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

Last year 3,500 babies born in the United States were named Jesus. Just like Joseph and Mary, the parents of these baby Jesuses probably know what it is like when broken systems compel you to migrate to a distant land, to cross dangerous borders, to find signs everywhere that read, “YOU ARE NOT WELCOME IN THIS INN.”

I have difficulty with the solemn Nativity depicted in classical paintings. But I can easily imagine scenes of Jesus being born in East Los Angeles or Chicago’s Little Village, born to a hotel cleaning maid and her concrete-finisher boyfriend, clothed with diapers from a thrift store, with the birth welcomed and witnessed by a crowd of undocumented cooks and roofers. It is in the very midst of the mess of broken justice, broken borders, and broken people that Hope must be born into the world.

Today, Hope comes to the world. We should call it Jesus.

PRAY for the Diocese of Kitale (Kenya)