

VIEWPOINTS

Forgiveness in an imperfect world

Welcome to the worldwide discussion on love and forgiveness.

• Last week, Scotland released a man convicted of killing 270 people in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988. Abdel Baset al-Megrahi, ill with terminal cancer, was sent home to die in Libya, where he received a hero's welcome. Scottish Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill had made it clear Megrahi was being released on compassionate grounds.

• Also last week, 41 years after American soldiers killed hundreds of civilians in My Lai, Vietnam, the only man convicted in the massacre, former 2nd Lt. William Calley, issued his first public statement, having served three and a half years of house arrest after being found guilty of killing 22 civilian Vietnamese.

Joseph Ryan

"There is not a day that goes by that I do not feel remorse for what happened that day in My Lai," Calley reportedly told a Kiwanis Club in Georgia. Calley said he was following orders, "foolishly, I guess," and that he feels "remorse for the Vietnamese who were killed, for their families, for the American soldiers involved and their families. I am very sorry."

• Closer to home, the Philadelphia Eagles are paying convicted felon Michael Vick \$1.6 million this year to play football. Vick served more than a year and a half in prison for the depraved and casual torture and killing of dogs in his Bad Newz Kennels' dog-fighting operation. Does his Eagles' salary represent the wages of sin or the riches of repentance and forgiveness?

We know Christ has asked us to love one another as he loved us. That's a deceptively simple command that we all struggle with in our daily lives. Just rush hour traffic can test Christian love of neighbor.

The call to love was further complicated when Christ asked us to approach God with a magnanimous heart, to pray for forgiveness "as we forgive those who trespass against us." Loving each other as God loves us is one thing, but forgiving each other as God forgives us taxes our ability to forget and our desire for justice.

Amid the celebration for Megrahi in Libya and the outraged reaction in Scotland and the United States, a priest in

Scotland, Father Patrick Keegans, said he believes "an innocent man has gone home." Father Keegans told Catholic News Service that Megrahi, "is a dying man and the best way to deal with him is in a true and proper fashion as a human being and let him die at home with his family and friends." The priest, who has ministered to American families of the Lockerbie victims, also acknowledged that survivors found his visits to Megrahi in prison difficult.

Justice in this life isn't perfect. Was a 2nd lieutenant the only person to blame in a military chain of command for the My Lai killings? How many times and over how many centuries have civilians been killed in warfare without compunction and without accountability?

Quarterback Vick, amid his negotiations with the Eagles, went to the national confessional, "60 Minutes," to repent for his sins. In his stone-faced fashion, he said he understood his failure and promised to sin no more. The Good News tells us that the Bad Newz proprietor should be forgiven. Yet the New Testament is silent on absolution that comes with a big contract and an option for a second year.

Love and forgiveness are required for Christians, and they demand our prayerful work. In the meantime, in an imperfect world where truth can be elusive and justice is human, I find solace in the title of a Leo Tolstoy story that was required reading in Catholic high school: "God sees the truth, but waits."

Ryan is assistant editor of *The Dialog*.

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Happy encounters, sad events at migrant camps

There are at least 57 camps for migrant laborers in the Wilmington diocese. The majority are located in the Galena, Dover and Easton regions. The two camps with the highest populations of about 500 each are located in Delaware Park (horse groomers) and Westover (tomato farmers). Also, crab pickers on Hooper's Island, mushroom workers in Rising Sun, and apple pickers in Elkton, Colora and Bridgeville migrate each season. Our diocesan Hispanic Ministry team assists parishes in locating migrant laborers and training parish-based welcoming teams.

Often, the laborers work for excruciating hours with low pay and substandard, deplorable and filthy housing. At some camps, the use of stinky, portable outdoor latrines is the norm. In July, 30 laborers at one camp had neither electricity nor running water for a week.

Recently, lay leader Celso Perez and I visited a camp with 30 men, women and children. Juan, a 21-year-old Mexican who has been migrating to Preston for eight seasons, was elated to see us, but had to return quickly to work. The place seemed deserted. Even though it was a Sunday afternoon, everybody was working.

One small dorm had a fan on, so we knocked. The door cracked open to reveal the dark eyes of a small child. She quickly shut the door and screamed, "Momi!"

The door cracked open again to reveal the wary eyes of a taller person. Once again, the door shut quickly.

Moments later, the door cracked open a third time. Upon seeing my Franciscan habit and Celso's cross, José introduced himself, his wife Olga, and their 4-year-old daughter, Elsa. They invited us to sit down on upside-down plastic harvest barrels outside near the entrance to their room. Originally from Chiapas, Mexico — the same home state of Celso, my visitation partner — Olga and José have been migrating between Maryland and Florida for eight years, often working seven days a week from 6 in the morning until 9 at night. Much of their income goes to their elderly parents in Mexico whose health is declining.

It was providential that José and Olga happened to be on a short lunch break when Celso and I arrived. They were especially grateful because this was the first time that they had ever received a visit from the church in the eight years that they have been in the United States.

We shared in a prayer and the Gospel of the day,

which was the feeding of 5,000. We offered them a sack of soft rolls to share with their companions. José and Olga gifted us with about a dozen watermelons and buckets of zucchini, tomatoes and corn. As we concluded the prayer, I offered them a blessing with holy water.

They were visibly moved and asked if it was possible to baptize Elsa. "Of course," we replied.

Olga's biggest concern was identifying suitable godparents. José responded, "Why not Celso? He's a holy man and we're from the same state."

Celso agreed. Of course, another challenge will be getting a few hours off from work to prepare and celebrate.

Later that Sunday evening, as I brought José's and Olga's gifts to the Hispanic congregation at St. Christopher on Kent Island, I was delighted to discover that some of the migrant nurserymen from Ridgely who attend the Mass brought vegetables from their own garden to share with the community: a van-load of corn,

cucumbers, watermelon, cantaloupes, and red, green, sweet and chili peppers. It was a contemporary feeding of 5,000.

All stories involving our migrant brothers and sisters do not have happy endings. Recently, violent crime has become a serious issue at migrant camps.

A Mexican migrant farmer was shot and killed during a robbery by two suspects from the neighborhood outside the camp. Also, Santiago, a Guatemalan laborer in the United States who looks much younger than his 23 years, was severely beaten. His face is mess. Several of Santiago's teeth were knocked out or chipped, the white of his right eye is blood-stained, and his cheeks are

swollen, bruised and scabbed.

After one night in the hospital, Santiago was prescribed five weeks of bed rest, alone in the camp while his companions work from sunrise to sunset seven days a week. Upon receiving a Bible, a Suffering Servant Candle, and a CD of several choirs singing Spanish hymns, Santiago lit up. After prayer and anointing, we sang church hymns for about an hour, taking turns playing the guitar. Although he was unable to articulate his feelings in any other way, Santiago expressed his pain, grief and faith in music and prayer.

Brother Christopher Posch, a Franciscan priest, is director of the diocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry.

HISPANIC LIFE & FAITH



Bro. Christopher Posch

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Quotable

"Following Christ fills the heart with joy and gives complete meaning to our existence, but it brings problems and sacrifices because very often one has to go against the current." — *Pope Benedict XVI, speaking about the demands of the faith at a blessing at his villa outside Rome on Sunday.*

"At the moment, there are no institutional proposals for a modification of the liturgical books currently in use." — *Vatican spokesman*

Father Ciro Benedettini, downplaying a report that Pope Benedict XVI is considering major liturgical reforms. The spokesman was responding Monday to a report in the Italian newspaper Il Giornale that a document with proposed liturgical modifications, including a curb on the practice of receiving Communion in the hand, had been sent to the pope last April by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

— *Catholic News Service*