

12/29/13 Holy Family A

-- The past week or so South Sudan has been in the news again as a bed of conflict. Some 15-20 years ago, there was Civil War there, and there arose the issue of the "lost boys." These young boys were forcibly taken from their homes and either murdered or forced to carry arms.

-- Lopez Lomong was one of those "lost boys." His book *Running for My Life* recounts his capture, his escape, his journey by foot to a refugee camp in the Congo. He recounts nearly starving to death, even while he was in the refugee camp.

-- Lopez was eventually adopted through Catholic Charities by a couple in New York State. He became a great middle distance runner, competing in the 2008 Olympic Games. After a number of years, he reunited with a couple of his brothers, and then with his mother. He had thought they were killed in the civil war.

-- His story reminds us that becoming refugees and being on the run is an issue that has not gone away. The gospel story of the flight of the Holy Family, found only in Matthew's gospel, has been repeated in one form or another over the centuries.

-- Though he was only a local monarch, Herod was a desperate, paranoid man. That is attested to, not just by Matthew, but by the Jewish historian Josephus.

-- Among Herod's many crimes he fails to mention this incident. But the murder of a dozen or so young baby boys could have been relatively insignificant to this historian.

-- This incident reminds us that life was not a Christmas picture postcard for the Holy Family. Not everyone welcomed the Messiah who was born in Bethlehem. Middle East hospitality did not extend to those who threatened a ruler's power and control.

-- This particular year, the year of Matthew, we are told that God is with those who are forced from their homelands. God is with the immigrant struggling to make a living in a new land.

-- As Pope Francis has said several times, God is with the poor and destitute. He himself has modeled that. Too often, though, those in power easily forget this fact. They tend to think that power is a divine right.

-- Witness how tough it has been for our own Congress to agree to immigration reform which is just and merciful and keeps families together. Too many powerful forces work against it.

-- As we pray for our own families during this Christmas season, we bring forward many concerns. Some have to do with the health of family members. Others have to do with troubles family members are experiencing.

-- While we do so, we should not forget those who have family members who are displaced. Some may be displaced due to service in the armed forces. Others may have family members in prison or who are away in foreign lands.

-- Still others have family members displaced because of war or local conflict. Others are awaiting their legal status to be clarified.

-- God is with those who are in such situations. For the young boy Jesus himself experienced what it meant to flee from danger. May we remember those who face similar challenges in their lives.