Opinion
NCR Voices
Cardinal Cupich at Mass at White Sox stadium

Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich criticized U.S. immigration policy and urged people to treat immigrants with dignity during his homily at a June 14 Mass in honor of Pope Leo XIV at Rate Field in Chicago, home of the Chicago White Sox baseball team. (OSV News/Simone Orendain)



by Michael Sean Winters

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June 18, 2025
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Is the debate over immigration about to shift? Specifically, are Americans finally realizing that President Donald Trump's draconian efforts to deport people whose only known violation of the law is to have overstayed a visa or entered the country without proper documentation is morally wrong?

First there was Cardinal Blase Cupich's powerful sermon at the special Mass to celebrate Pope Leo XIV at Rate Field in Chicago June 14. The cardinal, after discussing the love that animates the life of the Holy Trinity and our vocation to accept and imitate that love, said: "Humanity is diminished whenever the unborn or the undocumented, the unemployed or the unhealthy, are excluded, uninvited or unwelcome, or whenever we tell ourselves they are of no concern to us." Here is the

consistent ethic of solidarity for which Cupich has long advocated.

He then applied the lesson to immigration. "We should keep this in mind as we face the challenges of immigration in our country. Without question, countries have a duty to secure their borders, protect the public from crime and violence and enact reasonable rules for immigration," Cupich said.

"At the same time, it is wrong to scapegoat those who are here without documents, for indeed they are here due to a broken immigration system which both parties have failed to fix," he said. "The task before us in this moment as Christians, is to call each other to live with authenticity, as authentic persons, rejecting language or activity that demonizes and degrades the dignity of others, that pretends that some persons are unworthy to be connected to us. That is foreign to our calling to be persons in the image and likeness of God."

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Cupich went on to note the dishonesty of anti-immigrant sentiment, that our immigrant community was invited here, they didn't invade. We let them take on a variety of difficult jobs that non-immigrants don't want to do anymore. The cardinal's words were strong. They were powerful. And they were political. Usually, in a sermon, clergy tend to be a little vague when discussing politics. They refer to "the sanctity of human life" when they mean "abortion" or some such similar wording that takes off the political edge. Cupich left the edge on, which doesn't always go over well with a politically diverse flock.

Yet, the cardinal was interrupted with applause several times. I did not hear a single person boo. Surely, some of the people who had gathered in the stadium had voted for the president. Last year, in Chicago, Trump had the strongest showing of any Republican presidential candidate in more than two decades. And we know his supporters are not shy about voicing their support. We even know one of the pope's brothers is a MAGA stalwart! But there was only warm and sustained applause to the cardinal's message.

On June 16, the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, Archbishop Timothy Broglio, issued his strongest statement to date on the subject, promising the support of the hierarchy for our immigrant brothers and sisters while Trump ramps up his deportation efforts. "In the context of a gravely deficient immigration system, the mass arrest and removal of our neighbors, friends and family members on the basis of immigration status alone, particularly in ways that are arbitrary or without due process, represent a profound social crisis before which no person of good will can remain silent," Broglio said.

Additionally, a group of high-ranking prelates including New York's Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski, and the chair of the migration committee, Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, had a call last week to discuss what more could be done to aid the immigrant community in the face of the Trump onslaught. The bishops seem to be finding their voice and their responsibility.

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And, not just the bishops. In a remarkable podcast rant, Trump supporter Joe Rogan gave one of the most morally trenchant rebuttals of Trump's deportation efforts I have heard so far. "If you were in the presence of a woman who came over here from Guatemala and she's poor and she's starving and they're taking her baby away and she's wailing and screaming from a primal place in her DNA — the one thing she loves more than anything is being taken away," Rogan said. "A baby! If that doesn't freak you the f--- out, you're not a part of the team, man. You're missing it. You're missing it."

"I don't give a f--- if they broke the law. You don't take parents and kids and separate them. You just f---ing don't. It's disgusting. If you're saying, 'Well, they shouldn't have broke the law,' maybe they shouldn't have broke the law," Rogan continued, speaking in the manner he does when excoriating those on the left, expletives and all. "You don't get to do something that's a thousand times worse than crossing a line in the dirt, that f---ing imaginary line in the dirt, crossing [a border] is nothing in comparison to your crime of stealing a baby from its mother. That's  f---ing insane."

When Trump has lost Joe Rogan, you have to believe the tide is turning. What is the answer to Rogan's correct statement of the moral stakes? There is none. What is the rebuttal to Cardinal Cupich or Archbishop Broglio? There is none. The flames of

indignation that Trump has whipped up may end up consuming him and his signature campaign to deport millions of our immigrant brothers and sisters.