Opinion
Guest Voices



(Unsplash/Andrea Brambila)



by Yolanda Chávez

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

November 12, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

No exile begins at the airport. It begins much earlier, when the soul senses that something beloved is about to be stripped away.

For more than 30 years I lived in Los Angeles. There, I formed my family, my ministry and my community. There, I grew among migrant catechists, women of faith who, with tired hands, taught God's tenderness to new generations. There, I discovered my vocation as a theologian, accompanying those who live between two worlds.

But one day, the country that had for so long been my home closed its door on me.

I received the order of deportation, and with it, a silence so deep it could only turn into prayer.

On the day they came looking for me, I wasn't home; the agents were received by my son. They informed him that I had to leave the country — and that they would return to ensure that I did. No documents were signed, no words of comfort were offered, only the cold presence of a threat that crossed the threshold of our home. When my son told me, his voice trembled.

That night, I realized that staying would mean placing that weight on the shoulders of those I love most. So I decided to leave, not out of fear, but out of love, so that my children would not have to bear the shame or terror so many migrant families know.

It was a farewell without an airport: a domestic exodus, the beginning of my inner exile.

The return to Mexico was a journey without maps. I packed three decades of life into a few suitcases. I left behind my husband, my adult children and my sisters in ministry. I left the house where my dreams had taken root.

> Every displaced, misunderstood or wounded person carries within her a revelation of God that the world — and the church — still needs to hear.
>
> Tweet this

I returned to a land both familiar and strange. The streets spoke to me with an ancient accent, but my soul had changed. I was sent back to the starting point to

understand everything anew. At first, it felt as if the ground beneath me had dissolved; I didn't fully belong here or there. Yet in that emptiness, something new began to take root: a deeper faith, stripped of certainties. I learned that uprooting is not only loss, it is also revelation.

In the midst of confusion, God spoke to me differently, without temple, without platform, without microphone, only with the obstinate presence of silence. In that silence, I came to understand that exile is not only a geographic place, but a spiritual condition. Anyone who has had to release a life, a certainty or a familiar land has also passed through their own inner exile.

I discovered that authentic faith is nourished not by stability, but by trust. I remembered Mary hurrying to the mountain; Ruth walking behind Naomi; Hagar in the desert hearing her name spoken by God. All of them experienced loss as a sacred threshold.

And I understood that the Gospel, when lived from the margins, becomes a seed of radical hope. Where the world says "failure," God says "flourishing."

In the solitude of return, that promise began to pulse in me: the certainty that faith can be reborn even among ruins, and that every displaced, misunderstood or wounded person carries within her a revelation of God that the world — and the church — still needs to hear.

Advertisement

I have seen how current immigration policy has become a desert wherein human dignity evaporates. People who for years have worked, prayed and served quietly are suddenly treated as threats. The system that deports those who sustain the daily life of communities through their labor and faith wounds not just bodies, but also souls. When power decides who is allowed to stay and who is ordered to disappear, Jesus is crucified once again at the margins.

And yet, even there, hope rises.

There is something I have heard for years from the lips of migrant women: The Gospel blooms amid uprootedness.

I have seen it in the faces of those who serve the church without recognition, in the mothers who pray in low voices while their sons are hunted like criminals because of their brown faces, in the catechists who prepare lessons after cleaning other people's houses. In each, I have discovered that faith does not need stability to be fruitful. That truth, which I had so often helped others to name, became my own.

From Mexico, I continue accompanying my migrant sisters — now through online gatherings and retreats. Our conversations are a liturgy woven of nostalgia, resistance and hope. They, with their quiet wisdom, remind me that God carries no passport and knows no borders: God travels with God's people, crosses walls and dwells wherever love is welcomed.

My exile has become my altar.

I did not seek it, but it has returned to me the heart of the Gospel, one not preached from power, but from fragility. God did not bring me back to close a story, but to continue it from another land. I still believe in the God who crosses borders, in the God who remains with those who remain. And in this new stage, more interior than geographical, I discover that returning after decades is also a way of departing, that the promise remains alive in those who choose to believe even when everything seems lost.

"The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in, from this time forth and forevermore" (Psalm 121:8).

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.
A version of this story appeared in the **Dec 5-18, 2025** print issue under the headline: The Gospel from exile: A deported migrant’s story.