News
McElroy

Washington Cardinal Robert W. McElroy gives his homily during a Mass that he celebrated at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington Sept. 27, 2026, for the 112th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. (OSV News/Catholic Standard/Mihoko Owada)

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Rather than passing by a suffering victim like the priest and the Levite did in the parable of the good Samaritan, Americans need to take action to support immigrants who are in this country without documents and are suffering under the government's mass deportation policy, Washington Cardinal Robert W. McElroy said.

"For us as a nation we can pass by no more. We must stop, recognize the evil that is being carried out in our name, and fight every dimension of it," McElroy said at a Mass marking the 112th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sept. 27 at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington.

"We must seek to convert our political representatives from tolerating this evil or replace them," the cardinal said. "We must shed our identities as priests and Levites

and become like the Good Samaritan who recognized no boundaries in rescuing the victim by the side of the road."

Before the Mass, sponsored by the Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach of the Archdiocese of Washington, a multilingual rosary was prayed in English, and Spanish, as well as in the Tagalog language of the Philippines, the Amharic language of Ethiopia and Haitian Creole.

The concelebrants of the Mass included 18 priests who serve in various ministries in the Archdiocese of Washington, along with Washington Auxiliary Bishops Juan R. Esposito and Robert P. Boxie III and retired Washington Auxiliary Bishop Roy E. Campbell Jr.

"We come here to celebrate our history as a nation of migrants," McElroy said in his opening remarks at the Mass. "We come here to pray for and welcome all those who have come to this land, and especially and most deeply we remember and pray for today those who are in the undocumented communities as their time on the cross stretches onward and they know the peril, the fear, the overwhelming sadness that dawns upon them because of the policies of our government."

McElroy titled his homily, "We Pass On By," and he tied together the parable of the good Samaritan with what has unfolded in the United States under the government's mass deportation policy since last year.

He noted that Americans have two great legacies regarding "the immigrant and the stranger in our midst."

The first, he said, was referenced in the first reading at the Mass from the Book of Deuteronomy, where Moses reminded the Israelites to treat the stranger and the alien with dignity and respect, remembering that they had once been strangers and outcasts in a foreign land.

"This mandate suffuses the spirituality of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the moral traditions of virtually every faith in the United States," the cardinal said.

The American legacy of "reverence for immigration," he said, "has built us up into the great nation that we love so deeply. It was not people of great wealth who came to our shores, but the poor and the dispossessed, those seeking freedom from oppression and opportunities to build new lives in this new land."

McElroy said that in the past 18 months in the United States, the biblical mandate of welcoming the stranger and respect for the American heritage of immigration "have been replaced by suspicion, division, cruelty and violence."

The parable of the good Samaritan from the reading from the Gospel of Luke at the Mass "is clear," he said. "Both the priest and the Levite witnessed the suffering and pain of the robbers' victim. They recognized what was happening; they heard the call of pain; and they moved carefully to the other side in order to insulate themselves from having to take any action. They simply passed on by."

"For the last year and a half," the cardinal continued, "the people of the United States have witnessed the suffering of the undocumented in our midst, purposely and strategically magnified by our government, and for the most part, we have simply passed on by."

The cardinal pointed out how in 2025 Americans were told that efforts by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, would focus on securing the border and deporting those who had committed serious crimes, an approach that was not counter to Catholic teaching.

"But then we witnessed the indiscriminate raids on farmworkers and Home Depot parking lots, nursing homes and schools, and we recognized that this was a war on every undocumented immigrant in our land, including those who had been here for decades and contributed enormously to the economy and the culture of our nation," the cardinal said.

"We saw their suffering and the injustice of it, but we just crossed to the other side of the road and passed on by," he added.

The government's immigration policy then began to hit close to home for communities, he said, "ensnaring mothers and fathers and children and families whom we knew, fellow parishioners and coworkers who exemplify all of the best qualities that our nation is so desperately searching for."

U.S. immigration policy has spurred opposition in the country and resulted in deadly consequences, the cardinal said. "When our government laid siege to the city of Minneapolis with wanton violence and the killing of those who had spoken up in resistance, we were outraged."

Minneapolis protesters Alex Pretti and Renee Good were fatally shot by ICE agents in the melee.

McElroy also addressed how the government's immigration policy has targeted more than 1 million immigrants who came to the United States seeking asylum or had been granted Temporary Protected Status. TPS holders, he said, "were legally admitted here because of the danger that a return to their homeland would pose for them."

The Trump administration officially terminated the TPS designation for Haiti, effective July 27.
More than 330,000 Haitians in the United States were covered by the designation as of 2025.

Ending the TPS designation for Salvadorans is also under consideration, but an official DHS decision regarding it will be made "at the appropriate time," the Department of Homeland Security announced Sept. 9.

"Our government has decided that these endangered immigrants will be deported from the United States and returned to the danger in their homeland. These refugees never broke any law," McElroy said. "They are being deported because of a general desire to exclude immigrants from American society."

"They are being deported because the bigotry that has often tarnished American immigration history is rampant once again in our nation. We know this, but so often we cross the road to the other side and pass on by."

In concluding his homily, he urged the people of the United States to "work to stop those immigration policies and support the undocumented immigrants, asylum-seekers and TPS recipients being impacted."

In abandoning the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger and the Statue of Liberty’s promise to immigrants – "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free. …" – the nation risks "losing our soul," he said.

The congregation at St. Matthew's Cathedral gave the cardinal sustained applause, with most giving him a standing ovation.

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