

Gospel Connection - DECEMBER 6, 2020: **Second Sunday of Advent**

A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1: 1-8

Prophet on the border

In its October 5 issue, the editors of **TIME** Magazine compiled a list of the "100 most influential people of 2020." The list included the expected names of leaders in politics, science, education, business and the arts.

But the **TIME** list included an individual whom few readers had heard of: a 67-year-old Mexican-American nun from Brownsville, Texas. But her "influence" is as prophetic and as challenging as John the Baptist's preaching on the Jordan River.

Sister Norma Pimentel is a Missionary of Jesus and executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley. Sister Norma and her staff have assisted more than 100,000 migrants seeking refuge in the United States along Texas' border with Mexico with emergency food, shelter, housing assistance, clinical counseling and pregnancy care.

Sister Norma and her sisters began working with migrants 40 years ago. The experience, she says, "marked me for life forever. [It] triggered in me a profound sense of commitment and dedication to make sure that I become that voice for them, that I can be that force that can defend and protect life, especially the immigrants."

Sister Norma was born in Texas, the daughter of Mexican immigrants. She says she is a U.S. citizen by *chiripa* — "sheer chance." As a young woman, she studied art and design, but along the way found God — not the God of fear and punishment she first learned about as a child but the God of compassion and love. Sister Norma's vocation propelled her to the epicenter of something that is nothing less than a humanitarian crisis along the border she has called home all of her life.

Though the number of incoming migrants may vary over the years, their reasons for leaving their home countries remain consistent.

"It's the gangs and instability and how easily they're abused," Sister Norma explains. "They're afraid for their children, afraid of how easily someone can break into their house and kill their children or themselves if they don't cooperate, if they don't hand over their children to join the gang."

Such instability also makes finding work more difficult and families are often extorted for more money than they have and forced to work for gangs to pay off whatever is demanded.

This soft-spoken religious possesses a passion and power about her work, work to which all of us are called, work that Sister Norma believes is centered in our "connectedness to each other as human beings — that is key to every relationship and every ministry we do. If we put that as secondary, then we've lost what we're doing."

[**TIME**, October 12, 2020; **The Boston Globe**, March 1, 2020; **Global Sisters Report/NCR**, August 17, 2019.]

In her work, Sister Norma Pimentel speaks a "prophetic" word of hope to terrorized immigrants and a word of justice to the nation they have come to seeking asylum. To be a prophet of God's justice begins with embracing God's vision of what the world can and should become and then giving one's self totally and unreservedly to realizing that vision. In baptism, each one of us has been called by God to the work of the "prophet," using whatever talents and skills we possess to transform the wastelands around us into harvests of justice and forgiveness, to create highways for God to enter and re-create our world in his compassion and peace.