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EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Homeless

Homelessness is a major problem throughout the world. The unstoppable stream of refugees from the Middle East and other parts of Asia, e.g., Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as Africa, and other failed places like Central America, all testify to the worsening living conditions of millions and millions of people. War, of course, is the primary cause of most homelessness, yet nations still believe that war or some kind of military intervention is the best response to solve international problems. Instead, it just exacerbates an already bad situation. This is obvious in Syria. Half its population already has fled, some to Lebanon, some to Jordan, or to Europe, via Turkey. The destruction of homes, communities, and cities has uprooted innocent civilians, leaving them destitute and dependent, forced to live in huge tent encampments originally intended as temporary but increasingly permanent, testing both host governments and the victimized refugees stuck in a hopeless limbo.

Political corruption is the next major cause as the situation in Central America vividly demonstrates as parents push their children across the border to a more promising future. What desperation they must feel to forego the raising of their own children? Yet the United States response has been less than neighborly, treating the children as criminals, almost warehousing them until an immigration judge can determine whether they qualify for legal entry. Europe, which is much smaller than us, has welcomed over a million refugees just last year, quickly facilitating their re-settlement. Australia, forgetting its own immigrant history, is the worst, refusing entry to all refugees. Instead, they are paying Papua New Guinea, which is cash starved, to handle the problem.

The crisis of homelessness is a world-wide epidemic that is not going away soon. Denial or avoidance will only further prolong the problem. This is true locally as well as internationally. The local causes for homelessness are well known: cyclical poverty, mental health, racial and gender prejudice, loss of work, and alcohol and drugs.

Even a short time ago, homelessness was considered impossible in America or, at least, limited just to cities. That is no longer the case. It is an issue and fact along the entire coast of California. Chasing away the homeless does not work, though that seems the current approach in many communities, including Morro Bay which is more concerned with code enforcements than actual solutions. What harm is there to allow people to sleep overnight in their vehicles? Why couldn't public parking lots, at the Community Center, the Library, and Vets Hall be utilized as safe parking sites? If the city sets the example, perhaps the churches and even businesses might also participate. Instead of harassing homeless persons in their vehicles, the current city and police policy, perhaps we could provide designated safe sleeping havens which the police could easily monitor. Curfew hours could be established. Letting down-on-their-luck people sleep at night seems a reasonable and humane policy.