



you were once foreigners

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT, MARCH 1, 2026
LEVITICUS 19: 33-34

YOU WERE ONCE FOREIGNERS

America prides itself on being a land of immigrants, but not all immigrants receive the same welcome. In 1910 at Ellis Island, my grandfather, Anton Bellovitch from Brišonas, Lithuania, became Anthony Bell. Grandpa passed the mandatory health and English tests, paid his “entrance fee and left to find his cousins in Chicago.” As did many others, he came to escape authoritarianism, violence, and poverty. Like immigrants from Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe, he became an “alien”, the “other”.

They were bullied, beaten, mistreated, arrested, imprisoned, and disappeared. Anti-immigrant citizen groups reported them to the police. The US Customs Police forcibly returned immigrants to their home countries for having a criminal record, failing the tests, or being unable to pay the entrance fee.

In 1882, Congress passed the “Asian Exclusionary Act” that completely prohibited Asian Immigrants. In 1917, a second set of Exclusionary Laws was enacted to reduce by 60% the number of Eastern, Central, and Southern European immigrants allowed in America. In the text of these laws, the new immigrants were described as “undesirable.”

In Hebrew, Leviticus means “And He called.” God calls us to action. Calls us to show kindness and hospitality to the stranger, to remember that Jesus’ family fled to Egypt to escape violence. Calls us to remember that we are all children of a loving creator and that at one time, we were also immigrants to this country.

REFLECTION AND ACTION

In what ways can we apply God’s command to not oppress the foreigner in our society, our communities, and our churches?

PRAYER

Lord, give us the courage to stand against oppression and defend the marginalized. May we truly love them as ourselves, remembering that we, too, are journeyers in this life who have been welcomed by Your grace. Amen