

July/ 3/2022

“Wash and be cleaned”

By Rev. Edgar F. Solís

I found this article on a Christian blog.

The New Colossus by Emma Lazarus

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, with conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand. A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame is  
the imprisoned lightning, and her name is Mother of Exiles. From her beacon hand Glows  
world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command. The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” Cries she with silent lips. “Give me your tired, your  
poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

*When Lazarus wrote this poem in 1883, immigrants were entering the United States in great numbers, including Italians, French, Greeks, and Russian-Jewish refugees, among others. And sure enough, “The New Colossus” is itself a multicultural amalgam: an Italian sonnet written by a Jewish-American woman, celebrating a statue forged in France, contrasting it with one in ancient Greece. This new colossus, Lazarus insists, is “not like” the Greek Colossus, domineering and male, which in the third century BCE stood at the harbor of the island of Rhodes, like some conquering warrior and guardian.*

*No, this statue holds a beacon in her hand, signaling nothing less than a “world-wide welcome.” Her name is “Mother of Exiles.” She is unarmed, a light in one hand and a votive tablet in the other. Such tablets were common in ancient Greece for inscribing prayers or, in any*

*case, aspirations — and on this particular tablet is the date the United States formally broke from English rule: July 4, 1776. It's as if she says. We aspire to be free — now come, all you who yearn for freedom.*

I consider this a powerful reminder of the soul in the origins of our nation.

God loves the world, the entire planet with all its people and creation, but God sometimes will deal with people in power to manifest his will.

In today's Old Testament reading, we can see how God manifests his power and will to men in power. Still, today's Bible story can also inspire us to see how God brings unexpected people to collaborate in God's kingdom to produce meaningful changes and even wonders.

#### **Bible context.**

Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, Director of Preaching Ministries, states that our text is about obedience, but it is also about recognizing the voice of God in the voices of others. Naaman had little reason to listen to Elisha except that he heard the voice of the refugee girl whom he made a servant in his house. Notice this; let's get focused on where this miracle started. The big event, the fantastic miracle, started not in the political power of the kings, not even in the wealth of the characters, nor in the social status of Naaman. The change, the transformation, and the miracle started in the humble voice of a child! In the story, the foreign General Naaman is invited to wash in the river Jordan to be healed of his leprosy. This man in power, this person with considerable authority, was severely sick, and he needed a miracle!

#### **Theological Reflection**

My theological interpretation of this fantastic narrative is a simple but powerful reality that people in power are now in big trouble, not just political figures; I mean people in the highest structure of power in the world, the ones who make decisions and could affect millions

of people, men, and women with great power that can rule the economy and other elements of influence that are just like Naaman. They are just humans, and some of them have leprosy.

I am sure that for every person in power that need the manifestation and transformation of God in their lives, there are millions of people that can lead them to a miracle of healing, but as the Bible says, “Not by power, not by might but by my spirit says the Lord.”

Yes, dear church, we must be aware that our nation is experiencing a liminal time in its history.

We all have been witnesses of the significant challenges that we are facing in our country and the world, natural disasters, a global pandemic, workforce shortages, rising costs, unexpected economic disruptions, the atrocities of gun violence, threatening of war, political turmoil, division, racism, classism, and a long etcetera. You and I can blame the people in power for that, but a higher path is in front of us. As a sign of solidarity and faith, we can lift the brokenness of the world in which we live and invite the healing Spirit to guide us into paths of wholeness and strength. This first stage on our journey with the prophets is obedience and the willingness to hear the voice of God and collaborate, walk along, speak, and challenge the people in power to wash and be cleaned! Understanding this idea, we can become a different reference for change.

### **Conclusion**

Do you remember my message introduction? The statue of Liberty!

She is herself the personification of freedom, of course, the Roman goddess Libertas.

But compare her with Eugène Delacroix’s 1830 painting, *Liberty Leading the People*, in which Libertas carries a battle flag and gun. No, this version of Libertas is an image of peace and hospitality. In the decades since the poem’s writing, including in recent days, American

“nativists” (so-called!) have sought to recast her as a guard keeping people out, manifesting a spirit of exclusion and rejection.

But Lazarus’ poem stands as a ringing rebuke to this idea. This isn’t the old colossus or the Roman Goddess Libertas, but rather a new one. Far from keeping people out, Lady Liberty, that “mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning,” is welcoming us in.

You and I have much to do imitating two female characters this morning. This young servant girl gave direction of repentance, compassion, and healing to the people in power, and for sure, the welcoming and full of grace gesture of Lady Liberty, raising the light of freedom to everyone!

Happy Fourth of July, everyone!