

Are We a Stiff-Necked People?

This [Sunday's readings](#) are familiar to us: the First Reading tells of the Golden Calf where God tells Moses, "I see how stiff-necked this people is," (Ex: 32:9) and the Gospel is a variety of parables of which we are all very familiar, including the Prodigal Son and the Lost Sheep.

When reflecting on these readings, I stumbled across a cartoon from David Hayward, who goes by the moniker "[Naked Pastor](#)".

When I saw it, I immediately thought to myself how "stiff-necked" the 99 sheep were! When we hear the parable of the Lost Sheep, we often think only of the one sheep that was lost, not the other 99 who may have been acting stubborn, just as when hearing of the Prodigal Son, we only focus on the "lost" brother, not the other brother. We might also actually view the 99 sheep as just that—sheep rather than as an analogy for human beings who reject others. In fact, the 99 were the lost ones, just as the "faithful" brother in the Prodigal Son had some shortcomings of his own. (Anger and jealousy for starters.) Both the 99 sheep and the "other brother" were "stiff-necked" just as the Israelites in the Old Testament who decided to worship the Golden Calf instead of God. The Israelites were so "stiff-necked" that they didn't even realize that they were going through a crisis of faith and disobeying God. Like the 99 sheep and the "other brother" they were so certain of themselves that they were doing the right thing. But were they?



When Jesus tells these parables, he's addressing the Pharisees, which today has become a synonym for self-righteous hypocrites as they were so obsessed with following the letter of the law, they believed themselves to be better than everyone else. The Pharisees too were "stiff-necked" and did not understand Jesus' message—they accuse him at the start of the Gospel of welcoming and eating with sinners. (Lk: 15:2) But who was really sinning by turning themselves away from God?

As we enter this week and continue to reflect on the readings, let's ask ourselves: are we too so "stiff-necked" that we turn away from God and worship our own golden calves of materialism, self-centeredness, and false prophets? Are we following Jesus by welcoming and eating with sinners? Or are we Pharisees who reject the lost sheep and the Prodigal Son and judge others who are different from us?

Do we even welcome and eat with our own neighbors let alone those we might silently judge as "sinners"? Today our neighborhoods, communities, and churches seem so divided. Are we welcoming our immigrant sisters and brothers? Are we breaking bread with our LGBTQ sisters and brothers? Our Muslim sisters and brothers? Those who have different political viewpoints? Or are we so "stiff-necked" that we reject them like the Lost Sheep or Prodigal Son and don't realize that in fact we are the ones that turned away from God and sinned?

I've been in the D.C. area for 11 years and have worked at FAN for almost six. In this time I have encountered many who believe that they have all the answers, that others should listen to them, that they are in fact the "Chosen One." We know this to be false. At a time when we are so divided, we need to turn to God and work together using our "both feet" of faith and action to solve the great challenges of our time and welcome those some have deemed "the other" and we must be wary of false prophets and Golden Calves.

Jason Miller
FAN Director of Campaigns and Development

Suggested Action:

Reflect this week on how to become less "stiff-necked", opening your heart and mind to alternative ideas.

Suggested Petitions:

May we reconcile with the Lord in humble repentance of our sins and do our best to love as Jesus loved. We pray...

We praise and thank you, Heavenly Father for remaining true to Your covenant with humanity, despite our sinfulness. We pray...

Collect Prayer:

**Look upon us, O God,
Creator and ruler of all things,
and, that we may feel the working of your mercy,
grant that we may serve you with all our heart.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.**

Amen

Successful Catholic Action in Newark Supports an End to Immigrant Detention

The Franciscan family was well-represented at last week's [Catholic Action for Immigrant Children](#) that took place in Newark, NJ with over 20 sisters, brothers, and seculars in attendance. (See *photo*) The event saw over 400 people come together to protest the detention of children and separation of families.

The Catholic Coalition chose Newark as its first follow up event because many from that



region who came to the [DC action in July](#) expressed energy for a national action in their area. There has also been over 20 years of activism of Catholics in and around New Jersey to advocate for and minister to immigrants and their families who have been targeted by ICE for detention and deportation. Local groups have been working to pressure local politicians to end all detention and improve conditions in the interim.

The Essex County Jail was recently [in the news over conditions](#) for immigrant detainees that DHS itself said were not only unsafe, unsanitary and inhumane, they were among the worst in the country. New Jersey is home to three other detention centers, the Hudson and Bergen County Jails and the Elizabeth Detention Center which have also been plagued by poor conditions and avoidable deaths.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Newark gave a blessing to those participating, saying, "We stand together in prayer and solidarity with our immigrant sisters and brothers. When they suffer, we suffer, the Church suffers, the Body of Christ suffers. We are one in the Lord and share in the very suffering of Christ."

See photos of the event on [FAN's Facebook page](#) as well as this [album](#) courtesy of Ignatian Solidarity Network.

Take Action: Join a Climate Strike Near You

Climate change is the biggest threat to the future of our lives, country, and world. The [Amazon is on fire](#) and the consequences could affect the entire globe.

Following in the footsteps of [youth all over the world](#), a campaign called [#StrikeWithUs](#) has started to organize climate strikes to take place all over America. On September 20th, three days before the UN Climate Summit in NYC, **young people and adults will strike all across the US as part of a global #ClimateStrike** to demand transformative action be taken to address the climate crisis. Click here to [check the interactive map](#) to find a strike near you. If you don't see one, consider hosting your own strike.



FAN is helping to coordinate the faith community and promote participation. We invite you to join the [Facebook Working Group](#) for people of faith, created to easily share resources and information. As part of our [Living the Change](#) commitments, we urge all our members and friends to join an action in your community. **[Let us know where you are](#) and we will try to connect you with other Franciscans.**

One suggestion for dual participation: After your Climate Strike, invite your friends and family over for a [Living the Change Supper](#) in your home or at your place of prayer or worship. Developed by Living the Change, these suppers are delicious plant-based meals that bring people together to talk about why they care about climate change and why behavior change is one important part of our response. [Download the Supper Guidebook](#) to help you plan.

Multiple Opportunities to Advocate for Gun Violence Prevention

Last week, Walmart made some [announcements](#) in response to the shootings in El Paso. First, Walmart will no longer allow open carry of guns in their stores. Second, they will discontinue sales of several types of *ammunition* as well as discontinue selling handguns in Alaska. While this is good news, Walmart is one of the country's largest gun retailers and we feel they can and should do more. We urge our members and friends to [sign this petition to continue to pressure Walmart to end all gun sales in their stores](#).



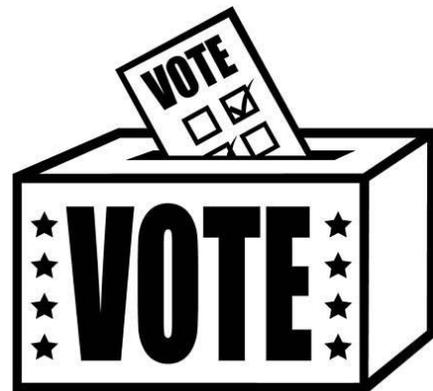
September 25th is the National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims and in Washington, DC multiple groups have come together to organize a [National Rally](#) in conjunction with the House Judiciary Committee hearing on assault weapons ban. Participants are being encouraged to wear black as a visual demonstration of mourning for ALL lives taken by gun violence. FAN will be attending the rally. If you are in the DC area, please [let us know if you will join us](#).

Finally, it is [known](#) that the shooter who killed 7 people and wounded 25 others in West Texas last weekend should not have been able to purchase his firearm and would have failed a background check. *But he exploited a loophole in our federal law...precisely the kind of loophole the Senate can close by taking action and passing a bill requiring background checks on all gun sales.* **For this week's [St. Clare Pledge](#), we encourage all our members and friends to make a [call to your Senator](#) and urge him/her to support background checks on all gun sales.**

Join an Action and Support Federal Funding to Secure our Votes

Without a paper trail, our voting system is extremely vulnerable to hacking and foul play. The entire national security community agrees that election interference is a genuine threat unless Congress acts. Yet, the Senate has failed to move forward with critical election security funding for states.

Right now, due to popular outcry, there is a chance to win funding in the next Congressional appropriations bill to secure our elections by replacing election machines with paper ballots. **On September 17th, a nationwide day of action** to secure our elections will see events happen all over the country in support of this funding. [Join and event near you](#). If you don't see an event near you, consider hosting one. Help is especially needed in these states: KY, SC, NC, TX, ME, AZ, CO, IA, GA, KS, AR, MT, and LA.



The House recently passed legislation that would allocate \$600 million to states so that they can update electronic voting equipment with systems that use verifiable paper ballots. **We need your help to get the Senate to follow suit.** [Click here to join an event on Sept. 17th.](#)

Take Action: Make a Comment to Save SNAP

Food assistance is at risk--again.

After Congress recently rejected cuts to our most important food assistance program (SNAP), the Administration is now proposing to implement a second SNAP benefits cut through executive action. [We need your help once again.](#)



Under the current law, more than 40 states choose to provide SNAP to families with more savings than otherwise allowed by SNAP rules, and to allow SNAP benefits to working households with somewhat higher income but with significant expenses for shelter and child care. This current policy option is known as “Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility” (or “Cat EI”). The Trump Administration is proposing to eliminate these options for states. If enacted, this would eliminate SNAP benefits for 3.1 million individuals and take free school meals away from 500,000 children in those families.

FAN has joined the Coalition on Human Needs and other partners in coordinating an effort to gain as many comments about this proposal as we can. We must make it clear that these cuts would harm struggling people. Please [take action and make a comment](#) here. **The 60-day comment period ends September 23rd.**

Register to Ring Bells in a Franciscan Call for Peace

The Franciscan family in Belgium reached out to us directly to tell us about their effort to [ring bells for peace](#) on October 4th at 2pm, “the hour of the Friday Prayer of Muslims. In commemoration of the 800th anniversary of the inspiring meeting of Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan Al Kamil of Egypt, with this ringing of bells we want to express solidarity and worldwide connectedness.”

Franciscan Call 4 Peace
LET US RING OUT PEACE TO THE WORLD



Additionally, this effort includes an invitation to religious communities to come together with other communities of another religion to simply meet each other in peace. In different Belgian cities, Muslims and Christians will come together to meet each other. Already [170 actions in 13 different countries worldwide are registered.](#)

We invite all our members and friends to participate. More information can be found at the website: www.franciscancall4peace.org

Celebrate World Day of Migrants and Refugees with the Pope

This year on Sunday, September 29th, the Church will again celebrate the [World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#), as it has since 1914. It is always an occasion to express concern for many different vulnerable people on the move; to pray for the challenges and increase awareness about the opportunities that migration offers.



For 2019, Pope Francis has chosen the theme “It is not just about migrants” to demonstrate our blind-spots and make sure no one remains excluded from society, whether a long-time resident or someone newly-arrived.

There is a host of [materials on this page](#) for use and sharing in planning an event.