

**"Upon Reflection . . . " A Message from Fr. Gordon
September 8, 2017**

His name was Alonso Guillen. A resident of Texas since childhood, when Hurricane Harvey descended on his home state, he was quick to respond to the call for rescue volunteers. Despite his family's objections, Alonso made the 120-mile trek to the Houston area, leaving his job as a local radio host. Once he got there, he and another group of volunteers set out in five boats, using a walkie-talkie to identify people who needed rescuing.

Late on the night of Saturday, August 29, Alonso's boat slammed into an interstate bridge. The collision hurled Alonso and another rescue worker into the rushing flood waters where they were drowned instantly. On Sunday, Alonso's body floated to the surface. "He died wanting to serve," his brother said of him. "He could have stayed home watching the news on television, but he chose to go help."

Alonso Guillen was one of the so-called "Dreamers" -- a recipient of the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Brought to this country as a child by his undocumented parents, he was among nearly 800,000 people currently allowed by the program to live and work in the United States without fear of deportation. A demanding and strictly monitored program, DACA requires (among other things) that recipients 1) came to the United States before their 16th birthday; 2) have lived continuously in the U.S. since June 15, 2007; 3) have completed high school or a GED, have been honorably discharged from the armed forces, or are enrolled in school; 4) have not been convicted of a felony or serious misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety. Yet even meeting the program's full requirements does not guarantee approval, and each recipient's record is regularly reviewed. I wonder how many native-born Americans would submit to (let alone pass) such a rigorous set of standards!

Yet even given these conditions and the program's overall success, this past Tuesday, the Trump administration announced that DACA will be rescinded after six months unless congress passes comprehensive immigration laws preserving the program. The President's decision places in jeopardy a program which has protected young and productive Americans (for that is what they are) from imminent expulsion. It was an entirely unnecessary action to be taken at this time, establishing an arbitrary and unreasonable period for resolution. Moreover, the decision has been opposed by a majority of voters, including lawmakers from both parties as well as leaders in the business and technological communities.

At this writing, efforts are underway to introduce a bill that will prevent the deportation of these Dreamers, possibly attaching immigration reform to other pieces of legislation. Nonetheless, the threat to these young people (most of them now in their twenties and thirties) still remains and the moral damage to what we say we believe as Americans has already been done. DACA recipients represent what is best about our nation's character and ideals. Having entered the country as children, through no choice of their own, they now choose to serve as teachers, doctors, nurses, shopkeepers, construction workers, lawyers, research technicians, and in a host of other worthwhile positions. Some are police officers and others serve in the military (currently, just under 900 men and women), placing their lives on the line for our safety and freedom. And some are selfless volunteers like Alonso Guillen, who could have stayed home in a time of peril, but instead "chose to go help." Apart from their strictly legal status, they are the definition of "model citizens. "

If you are concerned about these young Dreamers as I am, I urge you to consider contacting our congressional representatives -- Congressman John Delaney, representing the 6th District, and Senators Benjamin Cardin and Chris Van Hollen, Jr. Impress on them the importance and urgency of their vote to save the DACA program. Express your views directly to the White House as well, to the President's office. And do it repeatedly! A good internet link for information -- and sample letters -- is provided by the Huffington Post (huffpost.com), through an article written by a Dreamer, entitled "If You're Outraged by the DACA Decision, Here's How You Can Help Recipients Like Me." "If you can spare one hour a day," says the author, "your actions might make a difference."

Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). It's true that we have at present a broken and incomplete immigration system; and it's true that we need security at our borders and in our communities. These are legitimate concerns that have to be carefully and fully addressed, both with fairness and compassion. But to expel hundreds of thousands of persons who are every day contributing to the prosperity and welfare of our country, who by their "fruits" are demonstrating their devotion to the only land they've known, is not the answer. It is, in truth, morally wrong and self-defeating. America has always depended on the children of immigrants (legal or not), and among these those who have come here as children -- eminent Americans like Walt Disney, General Colin Powell, and Nikki Haley, currently serving as U.S. Ambassador to the UN!

We need the Dreamers to ensure our own success, even as we honor their success in fulfilling the American Dream.

Yours faithfully in Christ,
Fr. Gordon +