

*Enrique's Journey*: Walking in the Light of God?

Reading In-Common

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Natalie Ristau  
nristau@gustavus.edu  
1844 Bayard Avenue  
Saint Paul, MN 55116  
Home: (651)-699-2488  
Cell: (651)-343-6812

### *Enrique's Journey: Walking in the Light of God?*

How do miracles materialize during the darkest of times? Deeply puzzling questions such as these, often arise for people of faith. Throughout Sonia Nazario's captivating novel, *Enrique's Journey*, the reader enters a world plagued by distress; however, the people who offer up their hearts to Enrique inspire faith and transform his treacherous odyssey. Personally, my faith grows stronger when extraordinary events or other's selfless actions are witnessed firsthand. Consequently, *Enrique's Journey* has taken me on a path closer to God as I observe his encounters with generous people, strong family bonds, and the perseverance he demonstrates in following his heart.

When I see life through the eyes of a migrant, it is clear how simple advice and gifts of kindness become highly-prized jewels. The wise words of shelter director Olga Sánchez Martínez vividly remind the reader, and migrant alike, of the importance of God's gift of life and our duty as Christians when she urges, "God needs you. He doesn't need you with all your limbs. He needs your heart. You have much to give" (Nazario 92). Olga's conquest over health struggles and her stewardship toward impoverished strangers illustrates God's presence in her life. Therefore, Olga's actions radically transformed my viewpoint (along with the thousands of hopeless immigrants she aided) through the emphasis that she places on self worth. Furthermore, the munificent Oaxacan and Veracruzans crowd along the tracks and welcome the immigrants with bread, tortillas, bananas, sweaters, and lemonade, leading by Jesus' example (Nazario 105). These open-hearted people encourage me to mimic their positive actions and ponder the meaning of faith. Priest Ignacio Villanueva Arteaga echoes a similar message which undulates throughout the community of faith and rings in my ears: "Being a good Christian means

being a good Samaritan” (Nazario 107). Padre Leo is yet another one of God’s good Samaritans, who keeps ‘El Norte’ within reach for the immigrants and strengthens my faith. His telephone connects them with relatives in the United States, while his office overflows with food for the hungry (Nazario 169-170). Padre Leo is a beacon of hope along the strenuous trek northward, always thinking of others and those most desperate. He exclaims: “No. Let the mayor wait. Let the person who is most in need see me first,” referring to a migrant (Nazario 171). Furthermore, Padre Leo delivers a commentary to church members about their actions towards migrants, prompting the reader to serve and share their faith:

Running off a migrant is like turning against yourself. A person must be more than spiritual, he tells them. They must act...The worst thing as a Christian is to go through life asleep. (Nazario 173)

Padre Leo’s drive for leadership mirrors Gustavus’ mission: *to serve God and humanity to the best of our ability*. Through these generous gestures, it is clear that God is at work in our lives, inspiring me to try and emulate his ways with my own selfless decisions.

Through witness of strong Latin American family ties and commitment to each other, it is evident that God is our shepherd. Despite torn emotions from the physical separation, mother Lourdes justifies her absence – to provide money for her children out of the goodness of her heart (Nazario 4). Although she leaves much behind, mother Lourdes’ unconditional love for Belky and Enrique propels her forward. Trust in God, as she uproots herself from Honduras, motivates me as I set out on this college journey. Lourdes’ relatives (especially Enrique’s uncle and grandmother María) try to compensate in spite of the additional burden to provide food and space while she is gone. Enrique’s grandmother willingly shares her thirty foot square shack, which lacks running water and has no electricity in three of the four rooms (Nazario 11). Enrique and grandmother

benefit from each other and God lives within them both; grandmother María prepares meals for Enrique and he cares for grandmother when she is sick (Nazario 12). After all, God makes everything possible. For instance, Uncle Marco especially fills the hole that Lourdes creates in Enrique: “His uncle pays as much attention to him as he does his own son, if not more” (Nazario 28-29). Unfortunately, he is killed near the border of El Salvador, where he tried to support his family as a money changer (Nazario 29). Once again, my faith is challenged when I question why awful things like this must occur, yet I must *believe* that God has a greater plan for everyone. Eventually, Enrique’s love for his mother develops: “Each morning, before heading off to work, he drives over to his mother’s apartment. Each morning, he gives her a big hug. They love each other very much” (Nazario 263-264). This comfort which family members provide both in times of need and joy, illustrate God’s influence on their lives and urges me to give to others and faithfully serve.

Although there are many injuries and deaths alongside the train tracks, God is with these migrants as they traverse thousands of miles. They cling to their dreams and their strong religious faith which teaches me to hold fast to my own. Many Latin American migrants find their comfort in God by reflecting on Bible verses such as the twenty-third Psalm: “Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Nazario 102). Although many people look to God in times of trial, the migrants’ constant thankfulness for their progress prompts me to appreciate God’s assistance in my life. Thus, their confidence in God and will to attempt immigration until successful, is an enormous accomplishment. After all, these people are extremely vulnerable:

They are cold, hungry, and helpless. They are hunted like animals by corrupt police, bandits, and gang members deported from the United States. A University of Houston study found that most are robbed, beaten, or raped, usually several times. Some are killed. (Nazario 6)

In spite of the dangers, Enrique's persistence is not in vain, finally entering America on his eighth attempt. God's guidance and protection is a common prayer along the rugged migrant road, and it urges me to be faithful in my prayers.

God plays an integral role in these migrants' ability to undertake this thousand mile hike. He sprinkles kind people along the traveled path, just like those who compel me to make a difference. *Enrique's Journey* demonstrates that the road of life is often rocky and hilly. However, if one clings to faith and shares their gifts with others, there will be hope at the end of the long winding path. As we walk in the light of God, our conviction in Christ reminds us that showing love towards strangers, strengthening our family relationships, and dreams can take root even in the darkest of places.

## Works Cited

Nazario, Sonia. Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite With His Mother. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007.