

Lara Glass:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

Lara Glass:

Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for our responsive reading from your black Appleton Psalter Book, Psalm 87, found on page 44.

Lara Glass:

"On the Holy Mount stands the city He founded."

Congregation:

"The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob."

Lara Glass:

"Glorious things are spoken of you, O City of God."

Congregation:

"Among those who know me, I mention Rahab and Babylon. Behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia. 'This one was born there,' says they."

Lara Glass:

"And of Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one were born in her' for the Most High Himself will establish her."

Congregation:

"The Lord records as He registers the people, 'This was born there.'"

Lara Glass:

"Singers and dancers alike say, 'All my springs are in you.'"

Lara Glass:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

Good morning, everyone.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

I'd like to start with a reading from Matthew 5:40, "Give to the one who asks you and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

Twelve days ago, my mother was notified that she was awarded her United States residency. After 20 years in this country, she no longer has a temporary status. After 20 years, she no longer has to worry that she will be sent a letter asking her to leave the country. To be completely honest, it's hard to feel grateful towards any immigration agency when you hear the stories of children and families undergoing emotional trauma. It is hard to feel grateful after knowing the fear and sadness my mom felt when the federal government announced that it was no longer going to renew temporary protected status for Salvadorian residents. She feared losing her job. She feared losing her family.

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

However, to actively express resentment is not something my parents ever taught me, nor is it something that I am now looking to pick up to do. So instead, I want to acknowledge those that did give when my family was asked, the ones that never turned away.

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

My parents have had to fight to be here. They have had to fought to get jobs. They have fought to clean other people's offices and hotel rooms, and they've done it all with a pride I still strive to achieve time and time again. They remind me that they take the jobs they do because those are their best options. They did not attend an Ivy League or even get close to finishing high school. Yet, despite the countless obstacles, they understood that education was a path for upward mobility.

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

Even though they weren't able to help me with my homework at night, they made sure to ask me if I had completed it. They attended the parent-teacher conferences. They reminded me of the importance of good grades. Like thousands of other first-generation students, I internalize my parents' sacrifices and understood the agreement we had. I would dedicate myself to working hard in school while they would work hard to provide a roof over my head and food on the table. I can say that we both kept our end of the bargain. In just a few months, I will be graduating from here, Harvard.

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

This school has been a source of immense joy. I have been able to take great classes, develop relationships with professors, and meet my greatest friends. I know the experiences I have had here could only be possible here, but perhaps the most impactful experience is the one that culminated 12 days ago. After thousands of dollars spent and much worry due to time constraints, Harvard Law School's Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program took our case, and with their help, I was able to petition for my mom to become a resident.

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

I know that graduating Harvard means that I have a robust network behind me, but what they didn't tell me and that I'm now only learning, is that if I find the right people, my family will also directly benefit from the school. Once you've been in a place for four years, much of the allure dissipates. You realize that all those interesting classes you heard about are often lotteried, that professors can be hard to get a hold of, and that you know, lucrative internships are often contingent on who you know, what you know, and by when. But for my family, who experienced Harvard through me, this university continues to be a source of unmatched opportunity and joy.

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

And when I see what this university has done for us, assisting us when we needed it most, I am reminded that perhaps four years is not enough time to fully experience the wonders of this school. But assistance does not only come in the form of large institutions. What am I doing to give to someone that asks for help? Am I turning away that person that wants to borrow some of my time?

Elmer Vivas Portillo:

I strive to experience this last semester the best I can, by continuing to make great memories with the people around me. I strive to make this last semester the one in which my parents feel most proud, not only because their son is graduating, but because their sacrifices, every single one, had a greater purpose. Thank you.

Lara Glass:

Please join me in offering the Lord's Prayer, printed on the reverse of your Order of Worship.

Lara Glass:

"Our Father ..."

Congregation:

"Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Lara Glass:

Please stand as you are able to sing Hymn Number 352 in your Crimson Memorial Church Hymnal: O Gracious God, Your Servants First, number 352.

Choir/Congregation:

(singing)

Lara Glass:

May we live this day compassionate of heart, clear in word, gracious in awareness, courageous in thought, and generous in love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

