

[Spirituality](#)



A migrant, part of a caravan traveling from Central America to the United States, wakes up Nov. 6 after spending the night at a Catholic church in Tapanatepec, Mexico. (CNS/Carlos Garcia Rawlins, Reuters)



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As we begin our reflection on the readings today, I think it's important, first of all, to give a little context of this response of Jesus to the teacher of the law who asks a question: Which is the greatest? Jesus' answer actually comes out of the Book of Deuteronomy, a book that describes through sermons of Moses the history of the Chosen people, especially their slavery in Egypt, departure from Egypt, and travel through the desert and so on.

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Psalm 18

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28b-34

During that time, of course, during those long travels they were instructed along the way about various teachings concerning their relationship with God. At one point when they were being instructed by God, it was the time when God gave to Moses the commandments as part of the covenant which God entered into with the Chosen people. That covenant that bound them together in a very deep and special relationship—I am your God; you are my people. And then the laws that God proclaimed were the way that they bound themselves together by uniting the people in obedience to what God revealed as God's way of living.

I am your God; you are my people if you follow the way that I proclaim. So God has given them these instructions on how to live as God's own people. Over the period of time until the time of Jesus, the teachers of the law, the teachers of the commandments had codified the law into a whole set of rules and regulations that came to be 613. It was out of those 613 that this teacher of the law was trying to discern: of all of those, which is the most important? Which is the key law that gives direction for all the rest? What's the fundamental law?

That's when Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole heart, your whole soul — all your being, love God." Then Jesus adds, drawing from a different book of the Hebrew Scriptures, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's a very important part. In fact, later on after the time of Jesus, one of the disciples, John, in his first letter to the early Christian community, pointed out to that community, "If anyone says 'I love God,' but hates a brother or sister, that one is a liar. For whoever does not love a brother or a sister whom you have seen cannot love God, whom you have not seen. This is the commandment we have from God: Whoever loves God must love their brother and sister."

That's why Jesus ties these two together. How can we love the God we can't see? How can we even relate to God? Jesus shows us the way: Love your brother or sister in whom God lives, who has created that brother and sister out of love, just as God has created each one of us. When we love our brother or sister, we are loving the God who brought them into being, who brings us into being. We can love the brother and sister we see or we can choose not to love the brother and sister. If we choose not to love, then John says you are a liar if you say you love God.

This is very important for us, of course, as we try to live in community in our world. In our parish community we really do have to develop a spirit of love for one another, and that manifests our love for God. As one who visits your community on a regular basis and celebrates Sunday liturgy with you, I can say over the years I've experienced how you have come to love one another. This is a community that really shares the gifts God has given, a community that really cares about one another and reaches out beyond the community and extends that love to brothers and sisters who are not part of this parish. That's a marvelous and beautiful thing that you do.

But also we have to go beyond our immediate community into our civil community, into our neighborhood, into our country, into our world. I'm sure that every one of us is very much aware at this moment of the challenge that is being presented to us about loving brothers and sisters. Who is my brother or sister whom I must love? Is it only those whom we know, those we can connect to in some way? Or could they be strangers, people from outside our community, outside our country even?

It's interesting that in Luke's Gospel when Luke presents this teaching about the greatest commandment, the first and the second like the first, immediately

afterwards he shares the parable in the Gospel that Jesus told. It's one we're so familiar with — the parable of the Good Samaritan. We remember that parable, I'm sure. It tells about how a person was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. Those are the words of the Gospel.

What happens? As you remember the parable, a priest was going along that road, saw the man but passed by on the other side. Then a Levite saw the man and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, a non-Jew (in fact, Samaritans and Jews were enemies of one another), comes along and when he comes upon the man he was moved with compassion, with love. He went over to him, cleaned his wounds with oil and wine and wrapped them in bandages, put him on his own mount, and brought him to an inn where he took care of him. Imagine! A total stranger, an enemy in the social situation of the time, and he stops to bring healing, to bring love, and he takes care of the person, brings him into the inn.

But he has to set off so he leaves money with the innkeeper and says, "Take care of him. Whatever you spend on him I will repay when I return." Jesus asks, "Which one of those is neighbor to the man who was attacked? Which one of those loves the neighbor?" Of course we all know the answer — the Samaritan, the enemy, the one who reached across the border of nationality, religious belief, and broke down that barrier of hostility and brought love.

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I don't think I even have to say how we need to apply this today. Most of us, I think, immediately can think of what is happening in our country with the way that we are planning to push away people who are leaving situations of desperate poverty and violence and who are moving, walking a thousand miles to try to find a place of refuge by coming into our country where we have more than enough. It's a handful of people, relatively speaking, and they are desperate. What are we planning to do? Put soldiers at our border, build a wall so they can't get in, and push them back. The hostility is unbelievable.

If we really are going to take seriously what we're being taught in today's scriptures, how could we support such a policy? We have to try to change that. It's quite extraordinary how a poor country in Africa, Uganda, is doing just the opposite of what we are planning to do. There was an article this week that describes what is

happening in Uganda. The article starts off by saying that in the United States we are vowing to send the military to stop migrants trudging from Central America.

But in Uganda, the leaders have a very different approach. The man in charge of responding to the persons fleeing from South Sudan where violence has disrupted because of civil war; violence has disrupted the lives of the poor especially. What happens when those poor people flee that violence and that poverty and come to the border of Uganda? The article explains: The refugees are welcomed as they cross the border. They are allotted land, enough to build a little house, do some farming and be self-sufficient. The refugees live in settlements, not camps, with no barbed wire, no guards. They are free, can come and go as they want.

The contrast, of course, is extraordinary as many nations are securing their borders, turning refugees away. Uganda keeps welcoming them. They keep coming, fleeing catastrophes from across this part of Africa. Why? It's explained very simply by the person who is in charge of this migration and making these people welcome as they cross the border from South Sudan to Uganda. He says, "We are happy to have these people. We call them our brothers and sisters." They accept them as brothers and sisters.

Based on what Jesus says, is that not exactly what should happen, based on that parable of the Good Samaritan? Is that not exactly what should happen? We welcome our brothers and sisters. There are lots of reasons why the people are leaving countries in Central America and moving up to our country. We have to discern those reasons, figure this out, and try to get at the basic underlying reasons for people moving.

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Ordinarily, people (and I'm sure we can easily understand this), don't want to uproot their lives and walk thousands of miles to get to safety for themselves and their children. They would stay where they are. What is causing them to leave? We could help because we are connected with them, geographically, economically and politically. But in the meantime as we work on long-term solutions, we at least have to accept them as brothers and sisters. Otherwise we come to church and proclaim in our prayers that we love God.

"But anyone (this is St. John) who says they love God but turns away a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love a brother or a sister whom you can see, cannot love God whom you do not see. This is the commandment we have from God: Whoever loves God must love their brother and sister." It's easy to understand what that means in the circumstances of this migration coming from the south to our borders. I hope that our love for God is genuine because it includes a love for our brothers and sisters.

[Homily given Nov. 4 at St. Philomena Parish, Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]