

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Love God in the Widow, the Orphan, the Poor Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time/A
October 29, 2017 10:00 AM **Ex 22:20-26;** 1 Thes 1:5c-10; **Mt 22:34-40** (Thanks
for all the other ways, but this is what I really want.)

After several weeks of parables we now come to a dispute about morality. Matthew says that after Jesus silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees approached him; they were no doubt delighted that he had put down their opponents, and were probably seeking to shore up a new alliance. After all, Jesus had become pretty well known, pretty popular.

Now the Pharisees, in all honesty, revered the Law, the Torah of God, and among themselves they disputed different parts of it. So this question was not unusual: “Which is the greatest?” **Jesus agrees with many of the scholars that the greatest commandment is expressed in Deuteronomy chapter 6: “Love God with your whole heart, mind, and soul.”** So far so good, but Jesus never just lets things be. He had to add something. “And the second is like it,” but he wasn’t asked for a second; he was asked for only one. **By saying loving your neighbor as yourself is like it, he is making it equal.** He is saying the two are on a par.

Now the Pharisees knew very well that they were supposed to love their neighbor as themselves. That was in the Book of Leviticus, but it was only one out of six hundred different laws. And now all of a sudden instead of being one six-hundredth of the Law, it’s half the Law. You see the proportionality, the shift in balance that Jesus marks here. **It was hard for them to take and in all honesty it’s hard for us to take as well,** because we know that loving God is easy. God is love. Loving love, what could be easier? **But loving our neighbor, loving people, that’s not so easy.** It doesn’t mean simply loving people who love us, and so it’s not very easy. After all, Jesus did not go to the cross because he loved God; Jesus went the cross because he loved people. So it’s a hard teaching.

And related to it was that teaching brought up from the first reading from Exodus about reciprocation. **Love requires reciprocation. God is love, and he begins loving us and drawing us to himself, but we need to respond to that.** We need to be grateful for the many blessings God gives us, and specifically in the Scriptures from Exodus read this morning he says **reciprocate through the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the helpless.** They are the ones I'm especially concerned about, so as you express your gratitude to me, express it through them. Care for the widow. Care for the orphan. Care for the poor, and care for the helpless. That is a way of reciprocating the love and the blessings I've shown you. And that's the way I want it. **Thanks for all the other ways, but this is what I really want.**

In our own time we still have many poor and helpless among us. And we as a group, as a people, have to provide some kind of safety net to those who fall through everything else. Some in Congress today want to virtually remove the social safety net, and our bishops have asked us to protest. **I quote from them, the Bishops of the United States:** "The human consequences of budget choices are clear to us pastors. Our Catholic community defends the unborn and the undocumented, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick both at home and abroad. We help mothers facing challenging situations of pregnancy, poor families rising above crushing poverty, refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, and communities devastated by wars, natural disasters, and famines." So if you are so moved to follow through in action, **I invite you to speak up for those who lack power, to urge our senators to resist massive cuts in the *Supplemental Nutrition Program*.** Postcards are available in the library.