

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Welcoming Neighbor Refugees**

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time/B

November 4, 2018 Dt 6:2-6; Heb 7:23-28; **Mk 12:28b-34** (We need to examine our consciences on this topic and make a decision that is pleasing to God.)

“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

You are not far from the kingdom. But how far is he? The distance is the length between understanding and doing and for some people this is a short distance and for others a long one. **The Hebrew Bible contains 613 laws, and there was a great moral controversy**, as there are always great moral controversies, **about which were the most important**, or are they all equally important? Some said that they were all equally important. Some suggested that the Mosaic Ten were the most important, and that all the others could be fit into those ten categories.

But this young scribe wanted to know **which one was the most important**. Jesus refused to answer that exactly; he gave him two. That was the genius of Jesus that he was able to put two different laws—he didn’t make them up; he found them in his Scriptures—but he put them on the highest level of moral responsibility: **to love God with one’s whole heart, mind, and soul, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself. How do we love a neighbor as oneself? Walking in our neighbor’s shoes, thinking of what our neighbor must deal with in life.** This is a great commandment, and it’s a difficult one.

**In the parable of the Good Samaritan**, Jesus fleshed out what loving neighbor really meant, at least in his mind. And **what he described surely exceeds what many people then and now would consider reasonable.**

So today we are confronting another moral dilemma that is for many very touchy, and it has to do with **what do we do about our neighbors who are refugees from war or crime or poverty?** We could, like the priest and the Levite, prefer not to be involved. But we are involved, and **we need to examine our consciences on this topic and make a decision that is**

**pleasing to God** and not allow what the world thinks to determine our personal response. So today I ask you to prayerfully reflect on the plight of thousands of refugees and ask yourself: what **Christ would ask us to do?** We are a nation of over 300 million people, third largest on earth, and one of the richest, if not the richest. **How many neighbors should we welcome?** That's a question, legitimate question. **We can't welcome all refugees. We have to have some limits. What should they be?**

During the time of the administration of President Ronald Reagan we took in 140,000 refugees a year. But since he left office that has steadily decreased every year. In the last thirty-six years the average is 95,000 per year. Two years ago it dropped to 45,000. Next year it's supposed to drop another 15,000. Is this the best our country can do? That's a question you need to ask yourself. **This is something you have to decide conscientiously.** If you think it's right, then do nothing. If you think we need to do better, I suggest you write a letter or send a postcard to our president asking for a modest increase, maybe up to 75,000. But in all things let your conscience be your guide.