

Recently during an interview broadcast on a major television network’s weekly news magazine program a high profile Catholic political activist stated his objections to our nation’s Catholic bishops’ response to the change in government policy regarding DACA. DACA is the program that has allowed children brought into our country as minors by their parents who migrated here without proper documentation to remain in our nation under certain conditions. This political activist stated that the bishops, and by extension the church, should concern themselves with spiritual matters and stay out of political issues an opinion echoed frequently today by many others inside and outside of the church.

The Gospel of St. Matthew and the first reading today from the Book of Exodus confront this issue head-on. In the Gospel, the continuing escalation of the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities in Jerusalem continues as the leaders set another potential trap for him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus responds deftly combining the command to love God above all from Deuteronomy chapter six (traditionally called the “Shema” and recited daily by devout Jews), simultaneously joining it to Leviticus chapter nineteen which spells out the obligations the Hebrew people are to have to the person of the neighbor. Jesus forms a *radical union*—declaring: “*The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments*” (Mt. 22:40).

The Book of Exodus clearly spells out just who the neighbor is: “the alien”, the “widow” and in its prescription against extortion, the “poor.” The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) are replete with injunctions against oppressing people of foreign lands (refugees/immigrants) living among the Israelites; of denying basic human necessities (food, shelter, clothing, medical care) to the economically poor, widows and orphans. *For the Scriptures there is no distinction between faith and action. They are two sides of the same coin. Love of God is seen in love of neighbor, whoever the neighbor may be.* While the Scriptures and Church teaching may never be used to further partisan political goals or policies, the Church, its leaders and we members of it, have the obligation to translate the love of God, we cannot see, into concrete action on behalf of the brother and sister we do see, as the popes from the last fifty years from Pope St. John XXIII through Pope Francis

have consistently reminded us those who live on the fringes of society, especially the voiceless who do not roam the corridors of the institutions of political or economic power. This is the consistent ethic of life all church teaching regarding human life from conception to natural death. Political? Yes. Partisan? No.

God's will, desire, and good intention is that *all* of God's children flourish in this life. It is the law, ultimately, of a loving parent. There are all kinds of laws in both the Old and New Testaments, but they all boil down—as Jesus teaches today—to this: Love. Love God. Love your neighbor. It is, as Pope Francis has proclaimed being individuals and people of mercy—love's response to suffering, without condition, without borders. Love isn't only, or even primarily, an interior emotion, affection or attraction in the Bible. In the Bible, love is primarily seen and experienced as an action, a behavior, a commitment to seek the good of another or of a group of disadvantaged or otherwise powerless people by way of advocating for them in working for the just ordering of society (what in our Catholic moral tradition is called the “Common Good”) over and against purely individualistic or purely partisan interest.

Love of God expressed in love of neighbor teaches us that, no, you can't have everything, hoard everything, own everything. Catholic Social Teaching based in the Scriptures proclaims that the goods of the earth have been given as gift from God over which we have been given stewardship to be used for the common good not solely or primarily for selfish personal gain. They are God's possessions of which we will all be called to account. It's that simple, and it's that hard. God loves us just as much as God loves everyone else. God commands us to care for our neighbor just as God commands our neighbor to care for us. We are all one family, the law reminds us, one family bound by the mutual obligation and delight of love, real love, love that is not just a feeling but an action, not just sweet words but concrete deeds.

***“Owe no debt to anyone except the debt to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”*** (Rm. 13:8)