

Opening the Word: The law of love



Some Catholics, concerned about religious disaffiliation in the 20th century, seek to place the blame on poor catechesis. For years, they argue, catechists presented nothing more than the beige statement, “God loves you.”

These concerned Catholics argue that it is time to leave behind a vision of God as love, focusing more on the specifics of Catholic doctrine and moral teaching.

This argument, although grounded in a proper desire to uphold the gift of doctrine and the human flourishing available in the Church, fails to recognize how radical the law of love is. If God loves us, with a love beyond all human telling, then we must love one another in the same way.

That is the basis of the law we hear today in Exodus. Israel is not to do any harm to the widow or the migrant. Once, Israel was without land, without a home, without the spousal covenant with the living God. Care for the widow, orphan and migrant is an embodied act of remembering what God has done for us.

[October 25 – 30th](#)
[Sunday in Ordinary](#)
[Time](#)

Ex 22:20-26
Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47,
51
1 Thes 1:5-10
Mt 22:34-40

The same is true for the care of the poor. Just as God has tenderly cared for all the needs of Israel, hearing their

cries of enslavement, so too Israel is to ensure that their neighbor has a cloak. The Law conforms Israel to God's way of self-giving love.

The Law, in toto, is fundamentally about love. This is what we hear in the Gospel today when Jesus Christ answers the question of the Pharisees by referencing the commandment of Deuteronomy. One is to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul, with all one's strength.

The whole Law is [God's gift of love](#) to Israel. Keeping the Law is a return gift of love. The neighbor is to be loved, precisely because God is love. Because God first loved us.

Such love, by the way, is not trite. It is not a love of vague indifference or tolerance. It is the love that leads the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, to suffer the violence of men and women upon the cross. It is the love that is stronger than death (cf. Sg 8:6). It is this love, the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father, that raises Jesus from the dead.

It is this love that we are called to participate in, [to imitate and to become](#) in our very lives.

The statement, "God loves you," is by no means beige. It is everything. Divine love is what has led the saints to give up everything to follow Jesus Christ. It is God's love, which even now, leads men and women in every parish throughout the world to become witnesses of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And an intrinsic part of this witness is [love of neighbor](#). You cannot hate your neighbor and yet love God. You cannot defraud the poor, forget the unborn, pass over the hungry and thirsty on the street, abandon the prisoner to death and wish away the elderly from existence and still love God.

[If you love God, you love your neighbor](#). There is nothing more

radical than that. You may recognize that your neighbor has faults. Who does not? But the love of neighbor is not just about caring for those who we believe “deserve” it. It is about becoming a living, [visible sign of a divine love in the world](#).

God loves you. Even when we do not deserve it.

That is the Gospel in a nutshell.

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