

**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Lv 19:1-2, 17-18; Ps 103; 1 Cor 3:16-23; Mt 5:38-48**  
**Commentary by Emilio G. Chávez**

It is clear that this Sunday's theme is love of "neighbor." The first reading is from Leviticus, a book which takes its origin from an ancient school of Israelite priests. At first, this school was concerned mainly with "ritual purity": laws regarding what foods to eat and how to purify yourself after certain events, such as childbirth and, for men, nocturnal emissions, which were thought to cause a certain imbalance in the order of things. But after the Israelite prophets, in the eighth century B.C., criticized the priests' excessive concern with the animal sacrifices which were thought to appease the deity and insufficient concern for social justice, this priestly school developed and produced what is known as the "Holiness Code" in Leviticus, chapters 17 to 26. It is from this "Holiness School" that we get the famous commandment "love your neighbor as yourself," in today's reading, which did not include Lv 19:33-34, which prohibits oppressing the *ger*, the "resident alien" or "guest worker." This "undocumented worker" (we might say today) is to be treated as a native (*ezrah*, the full citizen), and he, too, should be loved "as yourself," the rationale being that the Israelites, too, had been such (*gerim*) in Egypt. What a lofty standard, and a divine command from the central book of the Torah!

The psalm sings of God's patience and loving-kindness, how God forgives and heals, how he does not treat us as we deserve, but overlooks our defects and faults and has great compassion. Our acting likewise is our way of complying with the command "Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy." In Jesus' version in Matthew's gospel, it is put: "Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." "Perfect" here is not "a perfectionist," but translates the Hebrew *tam* or *tamim*, the person of simple integrity, of one righteous piece. This is how Noah (Gn 6:9), Abraham (Gn 17:1), and Job (1:1) are described, and the same idea is applied to Jesus in his priestly sacrifice in Heb 7:26 (the sacrificial victim must be "perfect, unblemished," Lv 1:3, 10; 3:1, etc.).

In the Sermon on the Mount, which we continue to hear these Sundays, Jesus states the loftiest standard ever raised for love: to love "enemies" and to offer no resistance to wrongdoers, to overcome the natural, tribal, self-protective instincts of evolution, natural selection and survival of the fittest and allow God's Spirit to transform

our unbelieving selfishness into a new creation of self-giving, sacrificial “victims” pleasing to God. Offering these “spiritual sacrifices” of love is how we truly become God’s temple; see 1 Pt 2:4-5.