

**30th Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Ex 22:20-26; Ps 18; 1 Thes 1:5c-10; Mt 22:34-40**

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This Sunday's readings teach about love of neighbor. The first reading addresses the Israelites, who still have fresh in their memories that they had been foreigners and slaves in Egypt not so long before. They should thus treat "aliens," a category much discussed and debated in the U.S. and elsewhere today, as they would like to be treated. The Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Mt 7:12), expressed differently is "love your neighbor as yourself." This is the whole of Scripture, God's Word or revelation, in a sense, all that God wants us to do (St. Augustine thus said "love and do what thou wilt"). In 1 Jn 4:7-8, 12-13, 19-20, it is said that it is impossible to know or love God, who is invisible, if one does not love one's neighbor whom one can see (with TV today, this means we are all neighbors in this world; Jesus turned around the lawyer's question in Lk 10:29, "Who is my neighbor?" into "Who [acted righteously] *by becoming a neighbor* [to the despised Samaritan]," Lk 10:36). Thus Jas 2:26 says that "faith without works is dead."

The weak are especially vulnerable and to be protected; in the Bible these are the foreigner, the widow and the orphan (Dt 10:14-19). The "law of talion" ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," Ex 21:23-24; cf. Mt 5:38-48) is sort of a biblical "law of karma," "what goes around comes around." The Bible, in good Middle Eastern fashion, often threatens a punishment which corresponds to the fault: our reading contains a good example (even Jesus said "whoever takes up the sword will die by the sword," Mt 26:52). So this is a good motivation to treat others, even those who are different or "not one's own," as one would like to be treated if roles were reversed (remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lk 16:25).

The gospel reading from Matthew is in this tradition. The rabbis had discussed how to summarize the whole Torah, or divine Law; in response, the great Rabbi Hillel actually formulated the Golden Rule (however, in the negative) before Jesus: do not do to others what you loathe being done to you. Jesus, in response to the question about the

greatest commandment (singular), responds with two commandments which are inseparable: to love God with all your heart (Dt 6:4-5, the great Jewish prayer *Shema*) and one's neighbor as oneself (Lv 19:18, to be read along with verse 34, which enjoins that the alien as well as the neighbor is to be loved as oneself).

In Matthew, the hypocrisy of holding oneself out as a God-lover by mere talk without doing God's will, or by growing cold in love, is a sign that the End is near: read Mt 7:21-23 together with Mt 24:12.