

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Oct. 24-25, 2020, Cycle A

Once again this weekend we see the Pharisees back at it; trying to test Jesus and trip him up on his interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Whether sincere or conniving, a scholar of the Law decides to ask Jesus the basic question of all: "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" In other words what is life all about? What does God expect from humanity?

By now we all are familiar with the answer Jesus gives, and it is an answer that should affect us during this election season as we choose government leaders on the local, state and national levels. Jesus answers by quoting the Shema (to hear) from the book of Deuteronomy: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Faithful Jews recited the Shema twice a day, in the morning and at night. The Shema calls on our whole self to love God: the heart, the seat of our emotions; the soul, the center of our vitality and consciousness; and with the strength that flows from our mind. To the Shema, Jesus ties the command from the Book Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus is insisting that love of God is made real through loving others – caring deeply about our neighbor's wellbeing. Love of God and love of neighbor are two sides of the one coin of love.

In Matthew's Gospel this is the third time Jesus teaches love of neighbor. The first time He teaches love of neighbor is in the Sermon of the Mount when Jesus called for equal love of neighbor and enemy. We learn that even our enemy is our neighbor. Although Jesus calls for a four-directional love: love of God, love of self, love of those close to us, and love of those whose way of life is entirely different, or even antagonistic to ours.

Obviously to be emotionally healthy people we need to love those who are our near neighbors – those who think and act like we do. Loving those who love us affirms us and makes us comfortable.

However, Jesus is calling us to go farther – to love those who think and act differently than we might do. Jesus' insight is that without love of the other, especially the stranger and even our enemy, we will become caught in a one-dimensional self-love that inevitably leads us to conceive of God in our own image – we fall into the narcissistic idolatry of worshipping ourselves. We live trapped in a self-affirming hall of mirrors.

So, out of the love Jesus calls us to during this election season we should feel compelled to ask about the candidates presented to us: who has shown care for the most vulnerable populations? Who really cares about how we treat one another? Who promotes love? Each of us needs to reflect and decide.

Today's scripture reminds us that the alien, the widow, and orphan, the marginalized, the people most in need, are the people through whom God wants to free us from the confines of our tribes and idols.