

The Biblical Golden Rule is: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk 6:31). In the Book of Genesis, we saw how kindhearted Joseph was. Despite the way he was treated poorly by his brothers, he forgave them and reached out to help them in their time of need.

There is a more cynical version of the Golden Rule, “He who has the gold... rules.” Those in power often wield it unfairly.

- We recall that Joseph found favor with Pharaoh and was given broad powers to help as many Egyptians as possible. “When hunger came to be felt throughout the land of Egypt and the people cried to Pharaoh for bread, Pharaoh directed all the Egyptians to go to Joseph and do whatever he told them. When the famine had spread throughout the land, Joseph opened all the cities that had grain and rationed it to the Egyptians” (Gn 41:55-56). The Israelites suffered as well, and many came to Egypt for grain to avoid starvation. They felt welcome and stayed.
- “A new king, who knew nothing of Joseph, came to power in Egypt. He said to his subjects, ‘Look how numerous and powerful the people of the children of Israel are growing, more so than we ourselves!’” (Ex 1:8-9). “This king ignored the services that Joseph had rendered to Egypt, repudiating the special relationship that existed between Joseph and his predecessor on the throne” (Note to 1:8).

Memories are often shortsighted and there is a selfish side of human nature that often seeks to exercise the cynical side of the golden rule rather the biblical one based on helping others.

As a ruler exercises power selfishly, his subjects often follow suit. Prejudice and racism rear their ugly heads. As the foreign Israelites multiplied in number, they soon became treated as less than human. “The Egyptians, then, dreaded the children of Israel and reduced them to cruel slavery, making life bitter for them with hard work in mortar and brick and all kinds of field work—the whole cruel fate of slaves” (Ex 1:13-14).

We see the struggle of the Israelites mirrored in our own day and age with migrant farmworkers. They are willing to come to the fertile farmlands of America and work long and hard hours so that people have fresh fruits and vegetables. As they increase in number, they are often feared and treated with scorn as some wish to send them back to the foreign shores they originated from. When severe restrictions on travel and migration are put in place as we have seen with the pandemic, there is often a shortage of labor. In the land of prosperity, many others do not want to do the back breaking labor of the migrant farmworkers. When this happens, crops rot on the vine and the cost of produce increases for everyone.

It is helpful to recall some of the social justiceⁱ tenets of our faith lest we fall into the temptation of not treating others as we would like to be treated.

- Every human life is sacred. It is a gift from God. In Egypt, the Pharaoh sought to kill every male child as a way to reduce the growth of the Israelites. In America, human life is under direct attack from abortion. Those who suffer worst are the unborn children of minorities where prejudice rears its head in the form of policies that are like wolves in sheep’s clothing.
- Justice calls us to exercise a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. “In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.”
- Solidarity: We are our brothers and sisters’ keepers, no matter our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI said it very well “if you want peace, work for justice.”ⁱⁱ

ⁱ [usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching](https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching)

ⁱⁱ World Day of Prayer for peace, 1971.