

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday- A  
Deacon Pat Hall

*Exodus 22:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 1:5C-10; Matthew 22:34-40*

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/102311.cfm>*

These readings took my heart into two different directions. I resolve that problem by giving you two homilies. The first will be brief.

From Exodus we heard:

*You shall not molest or oppress an alien,  
for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.*

Is there a line of Scripture where we could more easily insert “America”? My alien past is rooted in England, Scotland, Ireland and Germany. Almost all of us here have a similar family story. This line of Scripture is for us.

Our US Conference of Catholic Bishops has taken a clear and vocal position regarding immigration. They issued a joint statement with the Mexican Bishops titled, *Strangers No Longer*. A link to that document can be found on the *Homilies* page of our website. (<http://www.vacatholic.org/documents/Immigrants-Strangers-No-Longer.pdf>)

I’ll share a paragraph in hopes that you may read the whole statement and prayerfully consider how our Church informs this most difficult and polarizing issue.

*The Church recognizes the right of a sovereign state to control its borders in furtherance of the common good. It also recognizes the right of human persons to migrate so that they can realize their God-given rights. These teachings complement each other. While the sovereign state may impose reasonable limits on immigration, the common good is not served when the basic human rights of the individual are violated.*

I offer all of that as a tease and a challenge.

But how can we not talk about our Gospel today: love of God and neighbor? What passage cuts more deeply to the core of our Christian faith?

So what is this “love” that we are talking about?

Let me read a short story:

*The huge eighteen-wheel semi pulled up to a truck stop. As fellow truckers watched from nearby diner windows, a middle-aged man emerged removing a*

*wheelchair from the back cab. Opening the passenger-side door, the burly trucker put his arms around a woman, physically lifting her out and into the chair. After arranging her carefully, closing the truck door, he pushed her into the diner. From a now silent table of truckers came the quiet comment, "Now that is love."<sup>i</sup>*

So much of the love that is portrayed in our media has to do with those compelling urges of romantic attraction. Now don't get me wrong, I'm a big fan of attraction and affection. But today I'm talking about the love we choose to love with. This is the kind of love like when a mother chooses to attend to her child who has the flu and made a mess of him-self in the middle of the night. There's nothing very attractive about that. She chooses to sacrifice and act in love. What a beautiful introduction to God for that child.

I was challenged in a big way a few years ago to share that kind of love. I shared that story with you before in a bulletin insert titled, *Deacon Pat's Love Story*.

In that story I spoke about God letting me know, while I was sitting in U-M's football stadium, how I was to love. It was in the middle of my taking in the crowd that I heard, "Do you see all these people?" I replied, "Yes." I then heard, "Love them all."

I started to throw a blanket of love over all of them. I was straining like I was trying to bench press 200 pounds. In my emotional frustration my heart cried out to the Lord, "I can't. I can't." I then heard with paternal softness and a bit of loving amusement, "Of course you can't...love them with MY love." And with that, the weight left and I was able to cast that blanket over everyone in the stadium. It was effortless (on my part anyways) and I was stunned.

As I started to return to normal, I heard, "Do you see that one next to you?" I knew he was talking about Jan, my wife, and of course I replied "yes". I then heard, "She deserves all the love that was shared with these thousands. Can you love her with that love?"

Well, my wife and I had been together for over 35 years. She's my best friend, lover and my partner in raising our children. She has always been first in my love. But as I tried to muster that same emotional strength that I had blanketed the stadium, I started to strain again under that 200-pound weight. But this was more than a struggle; this was starting to turn to anguish as I felt like I was failing, that all my love was insufficient for the one whom I cherished the most. My soul cried out, "I can't! I can't!" But then I heard God say with a loving chuckle, "Pat, of course YOU can't. Love her with MY love." And if one could apply a sound effect to that scene it would be like a "whoosh" and all the love that held tens of thousands of people just seconds before was focused on that dear lady right next to me. In a moment, I was able to love my wife with a completeness and depth that I hadn't experienced before.

On that day, I gained an inkling about how to love others with more than my love, but with God's love.

That would be a beautiful ending if it hadn't led to my current heartache. God has made it apparent that I am to pray for Kristopher Cheyne, Derryl LaFave and Danny Statler. If those names aren't familiar to you I'm sure you would be familiar with the names of Officers Trevor Slot and Eric Zapata who were killed by these men this year in West Michigan.

I do not want to pray for these killers. Did you notice I refrained from even calling them men? But somehow, I wish I **was** the kind of man that could pray for such men. Jesus is that kind of man. Jesus is that kind of God. In his moment of most tortured extremis he prayed for his executioners, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."<sup>ii</sup>

So how does one choose to "love" in this situation? I can tell you, I don't have it in me. I'm insufficient to the task and I would leave it at that if it weren't for that stadium experience. As a step towards that end, God is letting me know in our Scripture passage today that when I come up to an impasse in loving someone else, that I can begin by loving God with God's love. He's offering himself to you and me right here at this altar, to your heart, to your soul and to your mind, to love him as he loves you.<sup>iii</sup>

Now that is love.

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<sup>i</sup> *Fire in the Deep*, Robert J. Miller p. 201

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 23: 34

<sup>iii</sup> John 13: 34