Opinion
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Social Justice



A crucifix is seen at Our Lady of the Island Shrine in Manorville, N.Y., April 16, 2025. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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I sometimes find myself sinking into a pit of despair over the travesty that has become of the nightly news. Consider: U.S. government silence about the famine in Gaza, Trump's military invasion of peaceful D.C. streets, his vindictive firing of officials who dare to challenge his muddled grasp of intelligence, and the investigation of formerly high-ranking government leaders (some of whom he appointed) who disagree with him. Then there are the craven congressional cuts to Medicaid and SNAP programs serving low-income Americans.

Out of everything, what perhaps weighs on me most is Trump's budget bill that allocates $45 billion ($170 billion over 4 years) to implement mass detention of migrants with the stated goal of deporting 1 million immigrants a year. This will require doubling immigration beds to potentially more than 100,000 and target immigrants who are not criminals.

It also constitutes a huge windfall to private for-profit prison firms who — wait for it — gave nearly $3 million to the Trump campaign.

There is big money to be made by prison firms like CoreCivic and the GEO group, whose stock has risen by 56% and 73%, respectively, since the election. That these blood-money profits are being made on the backs of hard-working immigrant families fleeing violence and starvation seems not to register. How hardened have our capitalist hearts become?

Were we not overwhelmed by the corruption, evil and violence brought to us courtesy of the nightly news, there would be something wrong. It is an assault on the soul.

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Let's face it: It looks like the bad guys are winning. Where is God? Is there no heavenly response on the horizon? Believing that love of God and love of neighbor are one and the same, what am I being asked to do?

As my soul so regularly confronts the reality of evil, I am pushed to enter more deeply into God's mysterious response. During these corrupt and violent times, the nonviolent love of Jesus has something to say to us. Somehow, the power of the crucifixion is God's counterintuitive response to evil. As the Sept. 14 feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross approaches, now is a good time to reflect on this mystery.

Many explanations have been offered for why Jesus had to suffer. One of the most insidious is that God somehow willed Jesus' crucifixion to make up for our individual sins. While we believe that Jesus' death does overcome the sin of the world, it was not because God willed or caused it. Human beings caused it. Specifically, religious and political leaders used violence and coercion to preserve their own power.

In her book *Jesus Risen in Our Midst*, Sr. Sandra Schneiders, a Johannine scholar and a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, puts it this way: "The crucifixion was a classic case of scapegoating, and Jesus is the paradigmatic scapegoat who enters freely into the dynamic [of violence] in order to subvert it at its root and definitively conquer the Ruler of this world [Satan] on his own [violent] turf."

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By Jesus' glorification and resurrection, God exposed the futility of using violence for self-salvation, Schneiders says. At the same time, God showed us that divine love "cannot be neutralized or lessened by our violence." God's love is stronger than the lust for power at any violent price and, even more mysterious, the use of violence does not lessen God's love for the person using it.

This is something to hang on to, because we seem to be overrun by people whose lust for power (and money) is inflicting immense human suffering.

"Murder is our [world's]work," said Schneiders. But, she says, "it is Jesus' murder that will finally free us."

Meditating on God's power to absorb and transform evil through Jesus' crucified love brings a certain peace to my painful ponderings. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Moses lifts up a bronze serpent to drain the poison from people who had been bitten by snakes (Numbers 21:9).

Jesus compared his own "lifting up" (crucifixion) to the Moses story: "So must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14).

There is power in the cross to heal — both us and everyone else who has been bitten by the snake.

Jesus also tells us, "I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33).



People attend a vigil in support of immigration detainees at the entrance of the "Alligator Alcatraz" Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center at the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport in Ochopee, Fla., Aug. 10, 2025.

(OSV/Reuters/Marco Bello)

So back to my original question: Where is God? God is suffering with immigrants imprisoned in horrific and inhumane detention facilities. Jesus is suffering with immigrant families being separated and deported even though they have filed for legal asylum. And God is with San Diego Bishop Felipe Pulido and other ecumenical faith leaders — clergy and lay — all over this country who comfort and accompany immigrant families to their court appointments.

Jesus is also with Kansas bishops whose pastoral letter called for protection and solidarity with working migrants: "Treating all migrants and refugees as if they were violent criminals is simply unjust. ... Unnecessary raids, mass detentions, and family separations betray the values of our nation and the Gospel."

God is with San Francisco U.S. District Judge William Orrick, who ruled the Trump administration could not refuse funding to 34 U.S. cities and counties, including Boston, Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles, because their sanctuary policies limit cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials.

And I believe God is with the thousands of demonstrators across the country who protest ICE detention centers and arrests of hard-working migrants who have committed no crimes, including many who are here legally.

So rather than wallow in despair, perhaps these are the kinds of things I am being asked to do. Perhaps we are all being invited to join the nonviolent love of Jesus.

Consider spreading Jesus' nonviolent love in your own locale, perhaps through the League of Women Voters, the National Partnership for New Americans or the U.S. bishops' Justice for Immigrants campaign.

As the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross approaches, I submit we are being asked to make St. Paul's admonition our own: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).