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In a small Minneapolis basement apartment on a cold morning, I sat across a simple dining room table from a mother and wife in mutual grief, shock and terror. Everything had just changed. Her two grade-school children were quietly playing on the floor nearby, unaware that their father wasn't coming home. He had been picked up by ICE agents that morning, and as an undocumented man, deportation was a certainty.

This scene feels all too familiar to those of us whose cities have experienced immigration enforcement surges, like Minneapolis' "Operation Metro Surge," that is now drawing down. But this legal enforcement of our immigration system, or the "abduction" it has become seen as, is nothing new. What I witnessed happened 13 years ago.

The horror of current enforcement tactics has become the central focus of the national immigration debate, underscored by the Department of Homeland Security shutdown over the refusal to fund enforcement without strict guardrails. For Catholics, while we must certainly engage in these debates over enforcement, we must also confront a more fundamental question: While today's spectacle is undeniably worse in degree than the deportations of the last 20 years, is it really any different in kind?

We are reminded continually by Catholic bishops in the United States, who have regularly weighed in on this debate, that we must hold two principles in tension: a nation's right to secure its borders and the moral obligation to uphold migrants' rights through solidarity and justice. However, elevating a nation's sovereignty to the same moral plane as human dignity traps us. It forces us to treat current law, or what is "politically possible," as equal to the demands of human dignity. But we must ask: Was this system ever just? To find the answer, we must look at the system through the eyes of the poor.



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As Catholics, we cannot start with the academic question of "balancing" national sovereignty with human dignity as if they were competing interests of equal weight. Instead, guided by an incarnational faith, we must base our ethical viewpoint on the experience and wisdom of the marginalized. We must locate ourselves where Jesus did. As Pope Leo XIV reminds us in *Dilexi Te*, "This is not a matter of mere human kindness but a revelation: contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. In the poor, he continues to speak to us."

So, what does God say at the immigrant family's kitchen table, whose father or husband was deported? We see a system that does fundamental violence to a family and causes irreparable harm to children by separating them from their father. Does it matter if that deportation was carried out civilly? This immigrant family was drawn here by a global economic system designed to extract their labor while denying them legal status or public support. Treating them as disposable is not a policy

failure; it is a moral one.

The United States is the wealthiest country in history, yet its prosperity is built on deep inequality. Globally, this disparity drives migration; locally, our laws bar legal entry for the poor even as our economy thrives on their labor. These neighbors are forced into the shadows, exploited for work, and discarded by deportation when political winds shift. This structure is fueled by a racism that breeds both anger and apathy, ensuring that a pathway to citizenship remains perpetually out of reach.

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While the current debate is focused on enforcement tactics, we must also look beyond them. Of course, we demand respect for human dignity, the rule of law, and an end to the outrageous behavior of immigration agents. But our faith calls us to reflect on the law itself, understanding that any law that destroys "right relationship" with our neighbor is sinful. An immigration system that protects economic extraction and racial preference ruptures our ability to love our neighbor as ourselves. When the government takes our neighbors, not for a crime that harmed anyone, but for the "crime" of being who they are, the law has lost its moral authority.

Our current immigration law is not just broken; it is fundamentally unjust. It destroys relationships by creating a caste system and shattering families in the name of sovereignty. It feeds off and sustains our worst racist prejudices. This is a structure of sin. As people of faith, we cannot endorse or accept this state of affairs. To do so is to deny our God.

As we enter Lent, we have to recognize that our system is not just "broken" and that we cannot return to the "civil" deportations of the past. We must resist this structure of sin and fight for a total transformation of how we see our neighbors, building a moral foundation to enact laws that reflect our values of welcome, inclusion and justice. Love of God requires nothing less.

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