

You shall not oppress the undocumented workers who are in your land. Deut 24:14

The Bible often speaks of our duty to protect vulnerable classes of people in society. This duty takes precedence even over religious practice. Hear the prophet Isaiah as he speaks for God:

When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. ... Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. -- Isaiah 1:15-17

One class of people often cited along with widows and orphans are “sojourners.”

[The LORD your God] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the *sojourner*, giving him food and clothing. Love the *sojourner* therefore; for you were *sojourners* in the land of Egypt. -- Deuteronomy 10:18-19

Sojourners (sometimes translated “strangers”) were migrant workers; economic refugees. They are cited along with widows and orphans because as displaced people, they were easy targets for exploitation. The Law of Moses calls upon the people of Israel to remember that they too had been sojourners in the land of Egypt: they had gone to Egypt in time of famine and had become enslaved by the Egyptians. The preface to the Ten Commandments recalls this experience: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.” In light of their own experience of liberation from oppression, the people of Israel were commanded to eliminate oppression from their own society. Thus we hear,

You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the *sojourners* who are in your land within your towns; you shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down (for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it); lest he cry against you to the LORD, and it be sin in you.

-- Deuteronomy 24:14-15

Jesus, in the New Testament, affirms the same priority for the weak and vulnerable:

“I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger [i.e. *sojourner*] and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?” Then he will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.” -- Matthew 25:31-46

Undocumented farm workers are the *sojourners* of today. They come in response to tremendous economic pressures, both here and at home. Corporate farming in the U.S. creates a huge demand for low-wage labor, and corporate farming in Mexico is driving indigenous people off their land. All people have a fundamental human right to struggle for their own economic survival that takes precedence over our asserted “right” to protect our borders. The immigrants we “define” as illegal are not criminals or terrorists trying to destroy our way of life. They are human beings who risk their lives to come here, take the bottom jobs, and subject themselves to oppressive and humiliating conditions out of economic necessity. These are the people who put the food, we take for granted, on our tables. If we define them as “illegal,” it is not they, but we, who are violating the law: **the Law of God.**