

In Belgium this summer two Catholic nuns were convicted of collaborating in murder during the recent genocide in Rwanda. The case has been a difficult one for church and state. In this particular crime in 1994, seven thousand Tutsi had sought asylum with the nuns. The sisters gave it, but then turned the refugees over to Hutu killers. Then the nuns fled to Belgium, hoping to escape arrest, but they picked a country where people can be tried for crimes committed somewhere else.

It's been a horrible situation all the way around. Some people question Belgium's right to serve as an international court of law. Catholics cannot believe that nuns were involved in mass murder. And in Rwanda, they want to bring to trial anyone else responsible for the genocide, but the number of suspects – if you can imagine this – is over one hundred thousand. In seven years they have convicted eight people.

This exaggerated example shows how human beings can let our disagreements go way out of control. Disagreements are common in every church, every nation, and every household. In fact, Jesus practically predicted it this way. "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth?" he asks. "No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three."

These difficult words are hard to reconcile with the commands of the one who said, "Love God. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Love one another." But in his preaching, Jesus did not predict that love would bring peace, nor that we should strive for peace at the expense of love.

Some people think peace in the family is the most important value. Jesus suggests not necessarily. Faithfulness to Christ is the most important value. Sometimes that will disturb our peace. Two people who both say they are being faithful to Christ may still disagree with each other. Disagreements are all right, as long as they do not violate the law of love. But having differences gives no license to violence, to verbal abuse, or even a cold heart. When people with disagreements maintain respect for one another, they keep the law of love.

I hope none of us ever has to face situations as ghastly as the genocide in Rwanda. But we all face situations where our arguments get out of control. When we disagree, even within the family, we are called to honor a greater value, faithfulness to Christ. It will not always bring peace, but it will bring respect and love.