"Above all, let your love for one another be intense..." 1 Peter 4:7-13

A great afternoon to you and to each of my esteemed listeners! Welcome to EWTN's Open Line Tuesday edition. I'm Barbara McGuigan, alive and grateful for the privilege of just being with you every Tuesday! God's airwaves are open and here are the numbers to call:

In North America call 1-800-585-9396
Outside North America call 1-205-271-2985
Our email address is always Openline@ewtn.com.

Last Tuesday on this show, we had a wonderful discussion on illegal immigration. I was truly heartened by your beautiful insights, true compassion and genuine concern for both the illegal immigrants and for the citizens of the United States. But I must admit that I've been patiently waiting for one very special person with a heart formed according to the Heart of Jesus to weigh in on such a complex situation as illegal immigration.

That very special man of God happens to be Archbishop Jose Gomez. I met him a couple of years ago after he gave the address at the Orange County Diocesan Prayer Breakfast to almost 1000 people. That brief encounter let me thank him for his excellent speech, which touched on what many these days think are "hard sayings," including a courageous stand for the right to life. When you meet Archbishop Gomez, you experience such a love of Jesus in his gentle eyes and warm smile.

He is so authentic, through and through. And on May 26, 2010, as you probably know, Archbishop Gomez was officially welcomed at a Rite of Reception Mass in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles! He is now a coadjutor archbishop in Los Angeles and is to receive the "shepherd's staff" from Cardinal Roger Mahony, who is to submit his retirement next February 27.

Archbishop Gomez will be the most prominent Hispanic prelate in the U.S. Catholic Church, and our prayer is that he will bring with him a transfusion of hope and courage and truth, emanating directly from the blinding light of Christ Himself! May the entire Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and the entire state of California, be suffused with the Light of Christ through Archbishop Gomez!

Well, last Friday, Archbishop Gomez gave an exclusive interview to the Catholic News Agency. When asked to give his background, he shared:

> I am both an American citizen and an immigrant, born and raised in Monterrey, Mexico. Some of my ancestors were in what's now Texas, since 1805. (At that time it was still under Spanish rule.) I've always had family and friends on both sides of the border.

When asked, "What is your view of the state of Catholicism among U.S. Hispanics?" Archbishop Gomez said:

> The number of Hispanics self-identifying as Catholics has declined from nearly 100% in just two decades, while the number who describe themselves as Protestant has nearly doubled, and the number saying they have "no religion" has also doubled.

When asked what questions he sees as key for Catholic ministry to U.S. Hispanics, the good Archbishop replied:

> Will they keep the faith? Will they stay Catholic or will they drift away – to Protestant denominations, to some variety of vague spirituality, or to no religion at all? Will they live by the Church's teachings and promote and defend these teachings in the public square? Or will their Catholicism simply become a kind of "cultural" background, a personality trait, a part of their upbringing that shapes their perspective on the world but compels no allegiance or devotion to the Church?

With perfect clarity, he said:

> Hispanic ministry should mean only one thing -- bringing Hispanic people to the encounter with Jesus Christ in His Church. All our pastoral plans and programs presume that we are trying to serve Christ and his Gospel. But we can no longer simply presume Christ. We must make sure we are proclaiming Him.

When asked what is the most serious problem Hispanic Catholics face in the USA, Archbishop Gomez answered:

> The dominant culture in the United States, which is aggressively, even militantly secularized..."Practical atheism" has become the de facto state religion in America. The price of participation in our economic, political, and social life is that we essentially have to agree to conduct ourselves as if God does not exist... Religion in the U.S. is something we do on Sundays or in our families, but is not allowed to have any influence on what we do the rest of the week.
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> This is all very strange for a country that was founded by Christians -- in fact by Hispanic Catholics. Indeed, in San Antonio, the Gospel was being preached in Spanish and Holy Mass was being celebrated by Hispanics before George Washington was born.

Asked what other challenges face Hispanics in the USA, he replied:

> In our Hispanic ministries, we must understand that we are preaching the Good News to the poor. The second and third generation of Hispanics are much better educated, much more fluent in the dominant language, and are living at a higher economic standard of living than the first generation. But still about one-quarter of all Hispanics, no matter what generation, are living below the poverty line.

> Combine that with high school drop-out rates of about 22 percent, and a dramatic rise in the number of Hispanic children being raised in single-parent homes – both strong indicators of future poverty – and I worry that we may be ministering to a permanent Hispanic underclass.
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> We have moral and social problems too. Our people have some of the highest rates of teen pregnancy, abortion, and out-of-wedlock births, of any ethnic group in the country. These are things we don't talk about enough. But we cannot write these issues off as just "conservative issues." To my mind, these are serious "justice" issues. If we want justice for our young people, if we want what God wants for them, then we need to find ways to teach our young people virtue, self-discipline, and personal responsibility.

Brothers and sisters, my hope and prayer is that next year, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles's giant Religious Education Congress, which is supposed to train thousands of catechists every year so they can form the young people in the one, true Faith, will feature only orthodox speakers. Most of the speakers are all right, but every year too many sow confusion and dissent from Catholic teachings. Some attendees have the discernment to sift through the lies, but many do not have sufficient formation to do that.

When asked what he tells Latino leaders, Archbishop Gomez said:

> Don't be intimidated by the truths of our faith. They are a gift from God. Let these truths touch your heart and change your life. You should own copies of the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. If you spend a few minutes each day reading these books and also reading from the Gospel, you will notice a change. You will look at the world and your own lives with new eyes.
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> "Be proud of your heritage! Deepen your sense of your Hispanic identity, the traditions and customs of our ancestors!" I tell them. "But you are Catholics. And 'catholic' means universal. That means you can't define yourself —nor can you let society define you—solely by your ethnic identity. You are called to be leaders—not only in the Hispanic community, but in every area of our culture and society."
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> As Catholic leaders and as Hispanics, we must reclaim this culture for God. Being a leader means, first of all, accepting Jesus Christ as the ruler of your life. The martyrs of Mexico all lived—and died—with these words on their lips: Viva Cristo Rey! ("May Christ the King live!") To be true leaders, the living Christ must be your king.

Asked what is the role of the Church in the political debate over immigration, Archbishop Gomez said,

> The Church is not a political party or interest group. It is not the Church's primary task to fight political battles or to be engaged in debates over specific policies. This task belongs to the laity. The Church's interest in immigration is not a recent development. It doesn't grow out of any political or partisan agenda. No. It is a part of our original religious identity as Catholics, as Christians. We must defend the immigrant if we are to be worthy of the name Catholic.
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> For bishops and priests, our job as pastors is to help form peoples' consciences, especially those who work in the business community and in government. We need to instill in our people a greater sense of their civic duty to work for reforms in a system that denies human dignity to so many.
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> While we forcefully defend the rights of immigrants, we must also remind them of their duties under Catholic social teaching. Chief among these duties is the obligation to respect the laws of their new country.
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> We need to help ensure that these newcomers become true Americans while preserving their own distinctive identity and culture, in which religion, family, friendship, community, and the culture of life are important values.
> I'm not a politician. I'm a pastor of souls. And as a pastor I believe the situation that's developed today is bad for the souls of Americans. There is too much anger. Too much resentment. Too much fear. Too much hate. It's eating people up.
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> In this volatile debate, the Church must be a voice of compassion, reason, and moral principle. The Church has an important role to play in promoting forgiveness and reconciliation on this issue. We must work so that justice and mercy, not anger and resentment, are the motives behind our response to illegal immigration.

Asked how he would respond to those angered by illegal immigration, and whether those in the USA illegally should face punishment, the Archbishop replied,

> As we stress the Church's moral principles, we need to be more sensitive to people's fears. The opponents of immigration are also people of faith. They are afraid. And their fears are legitimate. The fact is that millions of immigrants are here in blatant violation of U.S. law. This makes law-abiding Americans angry. And it should. We have to make sure that our laws are fair and understandable. At the same time, we have to insist that our laws be respected and enforced. Those who violate our laws have to be punished.
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> The question is how? What punishments are proper and just? I think, from a moral standpoint, we're forced to conclude that deporting immigrants who break our laws is too severe a penalty.
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> Now, this doesn't mean we shouldn't enforce the laws. It means we need to find more suitable penalties. I would suggest that intensive, long-term community

> service would be a far more constructive solution than deportation. This would build communities rather than tear them apart. And it would serve to better integrate the immigrants into the social and moral fabric of America.

So, my brothers and sisters, you've just heard parts of a reasoned response to illegal immigration infused with all the virtues, and given by an archbishop who fearlessly stands with the Holy Father and the Catholic Church's Teaching Magisterium. I welcome your comments and questions. Here are the numbers to call: 1-800-585-9396 and 1-205-271-2985.

Closing: I am filled with thanks, appreciation and gratitude for your calls and emails and for your patience in my response to you.

On May 28th, I was taken by a reading that is so applicable today from the First Letter of St. Peter 4:7-13:

> Beloved: The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be serious and sober-minded so that you will be able to pray. Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
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> Beloved, do not be surprised that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as if something strange were happening to you. But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly.

Until next week on Open Line, Blessed be God and may He mightily bless you! Bye for now!