

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Divine Fairness”

Fr. Frank Schuster

And so a friend of mine travels to New Orleans, goes to a bar and orders one corona and two hurricanes. And the bartender says, “Sure. That comes to \$20.20.” That might be my favorite joke right now. It is good to somehow keep a sense of humor. This has been a really tough year. We have the coronavirus, we have had protests, we have hurricanes, we have wildfires, we have hazardous smoke for air, politics run amuck and about half the world was overrun by locusts before all this...I think the only biblical plague we have left are frogs. So, I am telling you now, watch out for frogs!

I smiled when I read the readings for this Sunday because, with everything that is going on, the scriptures are now going to talk to us about fairness. You heard me right. Ask yourself, when was the last time you approached God with a question regarding fairness? Is your answer a matter of weeks or maybe a few minutes? Honestly, when was the last time you wondered aloud to God why some years are a lot better than others or why some people’s lives are, by your point of view, somehow better or worse than your own right now?

I lead off with these questions because the Gospel today has perhaps the most unpopular parable of the Lord. Let’s look at it again: you have this land owner who hires several groups of day workers, at different times during the day, to work in his vineyard. The first group begins work at dawn and the second group begins work later that morning. The third group begins work at noon and the last group in the late afternoon. At the end of the day, the land owner pays them all the same. I think our sense of justice would side with the group of workers who were there all day. Why should those who only worked an hour be paid the same as those who were there all day? Whenever I read this Gospel reading the inner child inside of me wants to cry out, “It’s not fair”. How can this be just at all?

But once we say that, we should probably define what we mean by justice. When we define the word justice, we probably think of equality and what is rightfully due us. This is as reasonable a way of defining justice as any. However, because God is infinite in majesty, when the bible speaks of us being made in God's image and likeness, that means there are an infinite number of ways of what that can look like and the grass always seems greener on the other side. God's sense of justice and our sense of justice doesn't always see eye to eye.

However, when we think of justice as equality or demanding what is rightfully due us, how often is the quest for justice really about "just us" or "just me"? How often is the quest for justice in our world about "just us" or "just me" at the expense of others? I think the answer to that question is "a lot!" This is something worth thinking about in the times we live in. The Good News present in today's Gospel is that whether we find ourselves in the story of salvation early in our lives or later in our lives, God wants us to receive the same gift of salvation as he wants to give everybody. God loves us all. Maybe the answer to the times we live in is to stop yelling at each other and start loving each other instead, the way God does.

And so again, when was the last time you wondered aloud to God why some people's lives are, by your point of view, somehow better or worse than your own? Make a list and then consider this. God's commentary regarding the topic of fairness can be seen right behind me here on this wall. When we speak to God about justice, I think God has every right to tell us that life is not always about fairness. Life is more about love and the desire to sacrifice out of love for others. I think if we spent enough time contemplating the cross we might come to a different conclusion as to what fairness looks like, at least in God's eyes.

My friends, we all have our gifts, we all have our struggles and we all have our crosses to carry. However, if we convert our hearts and follow Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, what good news it is

to know that no matter what I am going through right now or dealing with, the gift of his love and salvation is available to everyone if we just turn our hearts over to him. Once we do that, perhaps the best way for us to define justice is no longer “just us” or “just me”, but rather, “just Jesus”. What would the world look like then?