

Reflection for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“But that is not fair,” is a statement that most parents have heard numerous times as they raised their children. My father heard that statement so often from myself and my three sisters as we grew up he felt that it should be the family motto. He also claimed that the first sentence that each one of us spoke was, “but Dad that is just not fair.” It always amazed me that my three sisters and I all spoke the same first sentence. All joking aside, how often do we or others focus on what we would see to be unfair and become an advocate for what we would consider to be fair and just? This response to what is unjust would seem to be the right way to respond to injustice.

If we think about it most modern societies are built on the idea that all things need to be fair and just for every member of society. This idea of fairness and equality is something that we can see as being rooted in Christian ideals. The second of the two great commandments states: “love your neighbors as yourself,” clearly each one of us would wish to be treated in a fair and just manner. So often when individuals or a group of people become upset and angry it is because they feel that they have not been treated in a fair and just manner. So over the centuries of civilization, through family norms, cultural norms, church and civil law we have developed numerous structures that enable society to function in a just and fair way for all. Of course civilization is always evolving, so the family norms, cultural norms, church and civil law will be challenged to evolve with the changing times. As a people of faith we would see some things as natural laws, the way God has intended things to be and these natural laws would not be changeable.

In our first reading today taken from the book of the Prophet Ezekiel we read; “Thus says the Lord: You say, the Lord’s way is not fair!” This seems like a strange statement, how could our loving God ever be considered unfair? But if we look at last week’s Gospel reading taken from the Gospel of Matthew 20:1-16 we have the account of the parable of the Landowner and the laborers, in this parable the Landowner through great generosity pays everyone the same wage even those who worked for just one hour. At first glance the Landowner appears to be a very generous person, but is it fair that the person who worked all day should be paid the same as someone that worked just one hour? To answer this question we can return once again to our first reading this Sunday taken from the book of the Prophet Ezekiel and read: “Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?” We can also reflect on our Gospel reading this Sunday taken from the Gospel of Matthew 21: 28-32 and think of the message of the parable that Jesus shares with the chief priests. In this parable we hear of two sons that are asked by their father to go and work in the vineyard, one says he will and that other says he will not. In the end only the son that told his father that he would not go to the vineyard shows up at the vineyard.

May we always be individuals that seek out what is just and fair, but may we have a compassionate and generous heart. We as a people of faith have a Creator that calls us to be just and righteous, but our Lord is compassionate and generous to all His creation. This can be a challenging message for us, we need to be just and fair, but we must be compassionate and generous. At first what we are being asked to do might seem impossible but it is not, we are just being called to do the right thing, but we are also being called to be understanding and forgiving. In closing as individuals and as a community may our righteousness have compassion, for then we will be embracing God’s way.