

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “About Justice Part II”

Bishop Frank Schuster

The readings this weekend feel like a continuation from last week. Last Sunday, we were introduced to the idea that God’s ways are not our ways. Our sense of justice is not always God’s sense of justice. I say this because our first reading from Ezekiel begins, “Thus says the Lord: You say, ‘The Lord’s way is not fair!’ Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?”

How often is our definition of justice, “just us” or “just me”? I mention this because it seems that the definition of fairness in our world is often about whatever situation benefits “me” the most, often at the expense of others. The world’s economy is clearly set up that way. Exhibit A, much of what we wear on our bodies or use in terms of technology are all too often assembled by people who live in impoverished conditions. That is just a statement of fact. We go through our lives trying not to think about it or simply get exasperated at the enormity of it all and say, “What else am I supposed to do? I need to have shoes. I need to have technology. I am on a budget and these things are expensive.” It can be way too uncomfortable to think otherwise. And please know that I am not judging anybody right now or trying to offer political solutions. I am not that smart. I am just simply raising the questions that I struggle with in light of the readings this weekend and hope that you will too.

This dynamic also happens at home. You see it between siblings fighting over the remote control or over the fair dividing up of chores. You see it between children and their parents when they argue about how much “screen time” they can have, how much time they need to spend on homework, or what time they need to go to bed. You see it between spouses on a wide range of issues spanning from finances, parenting matters, where to go for the next vacation, or how best to care for a spouses’ parent, the list goes on. In all these, and many other conversations between human beings, the quest to find what is “fair” is often at the heart of it.

And so, what is fairness? Happily, St. Paul has a definition of fairness in our second reading. He says, “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.” How about that? “Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves”. That’s fairness. Exhibit B, it is important when we talk about justice and fairness that we consider God’s commentary on this, presented here in our sanctuary (point at the cross). Ask yourself, is that fair? God offers himself totally and completely to us on the cross for the sake of our salvation. That is God’s commentary on fairness. He humbly regarded us as more important than himself, even when it meant sacrifice. Jesus challenges us to love others, even our enemies, in the same way as he loved us. That is his idea of fairness. Clearly, God’s ways are not our ways.

The Gospel reading furthers this conversation in that the Lord isn’t interested in just “talk” when it comes to our understanding of what is fair. You have two sons. One said that he would do the work and ended up not doing it. The other son said that he wouldn’t do the work but then did it anyway. Which one did the Father’s will? Clearly, the one whose actions spoke louder than his words. However, exhibit C, for Jesus, notice that “fairness” was not defined by

whatever chore that needed to be done. For Jesus, fairness meant “doing the Father’s will”. God’s will, in all things, should be our criterion of what is fair. It is why Jesus taught us to pray to our heavenly Father, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Not my will, thy will!

What does that mean for us during the times in which live? All the problems that the world faces right now can seem so very overwhelming, at least for me. However, sometimes the issues that can hurt the most are what goes on under our own roof. St. Paul’s advice to us is a good starting point for finding fairness when he challenges us, “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.” If every person in the world took that message to heart, what would the world look like? Honestly. We could also ask ourselves, “What would that look like for me or my family at home this week” if we all took that to heart, or “what would that look like for me when I am voting”? Perhaps the best question of all would be, “When I say I am a follower of Christ, what does that look like”?