

God's ways are not our ways

This lesson is repeated today

Sirach shows to an important distinction in our world

There is a difference between Justice and fairness

Fairness is a human trait

We see things

And we determine if they are fair or not

What is fair about someone getting cancer?

What is fair about some enjoying freedom?

While others live under oppression?

What is fair about a young person dying in an accident?

What is fair about living in poverty?

Fairness is not God's concern

He is concerned with justice

He hears the cry of the poor

The widows

The orphan

God is concerned with justice, not favoritism

He has established a covenant with all of humanity

He is faithful to that covenant, even when often times we are not

As a covenantal people, the well-off are called to take care of those who suffer misfortune

This is not charity; it is justice

What is known as a preferential option for the poor

Is not a matter of favoring the poor

It is a matter of justice

God knows no favorites

Yet He hears the cry of the poor

When the orphan wails

When the widow complains

When we call out with perseverance

Like the widow appealing to the unjust judge in last week's Gospel

God responds; He judges justly

Paul experiences this distinction as well

We continue reading his letter to Timothy

Paul is writing from prison

He knows his time is at hand

I have competed well

I have run the race

I have kept the faith

And what will be his reward?

Being beheaded at the hands of the pagans

Is this fair in human terms?

That is not Paul's focus

He writes in terms of a soldier finishing his tour

It is time to go home

It is not his choice

He is not in control

But like a troop of soldiers following orders

Being told to pack up

They will be returning home

Paul also follows his orders

And with great anticipation, he makes ready

So many had deserted him

But he holds no grudge

Paul has used his prison time to continue proclaiming the Good News

He is not concerned with what is fair

He is confident in God's justice

That God will come to his rescue

Not to free him from prison

But to lead him into the heavenly kingdom

Our Gospel continues the theme that God's ways are not ours

We have 2 people to consider

One a very good man

The other, not so much

The Pharisee was a religious leader

He is a model of observance of the law

He is not greedy, dishonest or an adulterer

He exceeds the requirements of the law

He fasts and pays tithes on all of his possessions

Again, exceeding the requirements

Externally, he is a model Jewish leader

Then we have the tax collector

A man who has sold out

He is working for a foreign government

One that is occupying his homeland

Tax collectors did not have a regular pay scale

They simply made up extra taxes people had to pay

What came in over and above what was required was theirs to keep

So they had the authority of the Roman army behind them

And they used this to take advantage of their fellow Jews

Our tax collector makes no claim of innocence

But prays for mercy

Not even daring to raise his eyes to heaven

2 polar opposites

Both come to prayer

One comes filled with self-righteousness

Comparing himself to others

Showing how well he carried out the external law

Arrogant

Thinking he could earn justification

Thinking it was all about what he had done

The other path is one of humility

Recognition that he is a sinner

He has not lived up to expectations

He was making no excuses

Not even daring to raise his eyes

He seeks God's mercy

Jesus tells us the tax collector goes home justified

The Pharisee does not

But he can't leave it there

If the tax collector only comes to God

With no intention of changing

He wastes this grace

For this to be a true moment of justification

He has to resolve to change

To begin practicing what he knows is the path he is called to walk

Reconciliation has an interesting Latin root

It is the same root as the term for eyelash

Reconciliation means coming eyelash to eyelash with God

Having Him gaze into our eyes

Reading our hearts and souls

And deciding what we are called to do

If our confession is the same every time

We can fall into the trap of the Pharisee

We can be there comparing ourselves to others

Comparing the sins we commit to the really serious ones we don't

But then never work on rooting out our sin

Whatever it may be

If I am unfaithful

To God, to my spouse to my children

If I use the Lords name in vain

If I am selfish

If I fall into the same trap of pornography or alcohol

If I think I can justify myself

If I compare myself to other human beings

Whatever and wherever each of us finds ourself

Coming face to face with Him who is mercy and love

Letting Him gaze into our hearts

Resolving to let go of our past

And become the disciple we are called to be

Knowing that everything we have

Health, family, our abilities

Our intellect, our work ethic, our life itself

It's all gift

Yes, we cooperate with what we have been given

We develop our talents

But at the root, they are gifts

And that frees us

Because it means that our salvation is not our own doing

It is what Christ has done

It is what Christ continues to do

And how we cooperate and enter into his life here

And be ready to accept the invitation to eternal life when it comes

Lord, have mercy on us