

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Life isn't fair! These wise words are often said by parents who try to explain to their children why they don't have as much stuff as their friends, or why they have to be home earlier than everyone else in the whole school! Of course, all of us have our scales of justice. And they all seem to work a bit differently from everyone else's. In reality, we know that life is very complex and that comparisons are almost always flawed in some respects. We may know who the richest person in the world is, but who is the happiest? It's really impossible to judge.

So we survive by doing the best we can. We seek to use our talents and gifts to the fullest. And deep down we know that comparisons with others are guesses at best, and in the end, quite futile. Furthermore, comparisons can be disheartening. That's really at the heart of today's Gospel reading, which is not easy to understand. It's one of those parables decidedly outside the realm of simple logic and reasonableness. How could one justify giving the same wage to a person who worked all day to one who worked only an hour? The worker's union would be horrified, and the all day worker would be angry. There must be something going on in this parable besides a discussion of just wages.

A Gospel Word for the Home

Matthew 20:1-16a

At an early age, children become incredibly facile arbiters of justice. They can calculate to the smallest fraction whether they are being given what they judge is their due, in comparison to what has been given to a sister or a brother, to a classmate, or to a neighbor. It's not that they want someone else to receive what they have, but, in truth, they want at least what everyone else has. This easily turns into dissatisfaction. To be honest, this kind of calculating can continue well into adulthood. If you judge this situation in the vineyard with a calculating mind, it will never make sense. That's why we have to get a different perspective.

One way to understanding this Gospel reading is to see it from the standpoint of the owner of the vineyard, who is a metaphor for God. Everyone was given one day's wages. In other words, they were given enough to sustain them for one day. Full life for today! Tomorrow is another matter. That's not the issue. It's just about today, and the bottom line is that God will always give everyone enough for today. That is God's way. God is generous and kind, and most of all, reliable. We all receive all that we need. This means we can trust God, and that's good. Better to trust God, than some human form of calculation.

Good parents try to do this all the time. They try to give each of their children enough. They don't hold back, and they don't compare one child to another. They know that each child's needs are unique. They are not the same. And if they simply give each the same, that same may not be enough.

Parent Survival

Justice is a wonderful virtue. It attempts to ensure equality and fairness. But sometimes, we need more than the scales of justice to be a good parent. We need a deep understanding and appreciation of the needs of each child, even an only child, to calculate what's best for that child.

God is like a parent. He gives to each what's needed. Sometimes what's given may not make a lot of sense to us. At times we must just trust the wisdom and love of God as it comes to each person. When we have to make judgments concerning our children, if we're honest and do our best, then we can and should leave the rest to God.

by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Car or Meal Talk

Ask your children for examples of when they felt that life was not fair. Then talk about it.

One-Line Prayer

God of Power and Love,
Give us what we need to be all that you
desire of us, and give us a grateful spirit.
Amen.