

Homily for September 24, 2017
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Deacon Nick Thompson

“It’s not fair!” Can’t you just hear the whiney tone that delivers that exclamation? I’ve yet to meet a parent whose child hasn’t at some point or other protested, “That’s not faaaiiiiiirrrr?” (Note the drawn out faaaiiiiiirrrr, added for extra impact on you, the parent.) Yes, we are all guilty, after all each of us parents were once ourselves a child. As common and grating as the phrase is, as parents my wife and I never quite figured out how to make it go away. We initially tried to use logic. Upon hearing the cry, we attempted to logically, explain why something is fair. “Oh yes, it is fair because you got to go first last time, and now it’s Billy’s turn.” It doesn’t compute, and the child retorts, “But it isn’t fair!” We later tried to let our child know the sad reality that life isn’t fair. The problem with this response is that the child is then unhappy, and can’t get beyond that unhappy feeling. And telling a child that life isn’t fair has zero meaning for that 6-year-old, who doesn’t have much life experience under his belt. *It’s not fair*, simply stated, is a form of protest toward what seems to be an inequality. Children feel they should be equal in every way.

Fair does not mean equal. In one sense being **fair means** to be just and good. To be **fair** is to be honest and have integrity. Fairness implies appropriate weights and measure. To be **fair means** to give things the right weight and measure accurately. Fair then means doing what each child truly needs at the time. Understanding the meaning of fair usually necessitates the child’s learning to delay gratification. We know that, in the end, most children will have gotten just what they needed, but it may take a while for that to happen. The ability to wait, tolerate disappointment and delay gratification builds over time and only with practice. In the end, Only God can rightly judge fairness because only God can rightly assess our individual needs.

And yet, It certainly seems like the disgruntled workers who spent the entire day in the vineyard had a point. It doesn’t seem just for them to receive the same pay as those who worked only a few hours. After all, they were out in the sun all day, while those other guys only worked in the late afternoon shade. Not to mention, the all-day folk had to stand-in-line to get paid last. But the owner of the vineyard also has a point. He made the same agreement with each individual group as he called them to work in his vineyard. He did not violate his

agreement with the first group by being overly generous to the last group. And no discussion was had as to who got their check first. The fact is that all the workers need a day's minimum wage to survive, to pay their' rent, to feed and clothe their' families.

God tells Isaiah to relay this message to us especially to those of us who want to judge fairness. He says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts." If we are going to pass judgment as to who or what is right or wrong and determine the way right and wrong are to be accomplished we had best be consulting directly with God because his is the only opinion that matters.

The Lord Jesus is not being unfair to his closest followers when He says to the man dying on the cross next to Him, "This day you shall be with me in paradise." The man we name Dismas didn't follow the Lord throughout Galilee and Judea. He didn't leave his family and friends. He didn't sleep outside when lodging couldn't be found. Rather, Dismas was busy stealing from people. While Jesus' first followers were striving to be good people, Dismas was refining his skills as a thief. Was it fair that He should be rewarded with heaven, and get to arrive even before the disciples, when all he did was to make a profession of faith in Jesus moments before his death? Yes, it is fair. God's gracious gift to Dismas did not replace or diminish the gifts he offered those who followed Him from the beginning of His ministry. Dismas may have been just minutes away from his death, but it was not too late for him. It is never too late with the Lord. Heaven is the minimum wage for realization of faith.

This Gospel reading really applies to each of us in two different ways. First of all, it tells us to listen carefully for the Lord's call to conversion and to reply faithfully when we hear. Consider the tremendous gift of parents who are determined that their children share from birth in the Life of Christ whom they recognize as the heart of their family. These children receive their first call to follow the Lord at birth but even they often fail to hear. Throughout our lives the Lord continuously calls, continuously provides us opportunities to come into his vineyard regardless of our lot in life. That call comes in ways unexpected, anything from a crisis situation where people realize they need God, to a simple inner longing for a happiness that the world cannot give. The call itself is Grace. The Lord pours it out extravagantly upon all people,

in many ways at many times throughout our lives. Some embrace it with a mere sip others need to drown in it to even take notice of it.

Isaiah again cries out to us for God, “Let the scoundrel forsake his way and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the lord for mercy.” And in this we discover the second way the gospel parable applies to us. It is never too late for the Lord. Christ continually calls us to himself. Salvation is a process, not a one-time event. All of us have had and will have times in our lives that we have not been as committed to God as we should have been. Worse, there have been times in our lives that we have rejected Him. There have been times of sin. But the Lord has not rejected us. He continually goes into the marketplaces of our lives and calls us to come and work in His vineyard. It is never too late to do the Lord’s work, never too late for those joining the faith, never too late for those returning to the faith, and never too late for you and me to strengthen our witness to Christ.

So, is God unjust for rewarding those who have worked only a short time in the field? No. Is He unjust when He calls us to turn from sin, return to Him and get back to His work? No again. It is never too late for us to respond to God’s grace as long as we have life within us there is time. Do we think that those martyrs killed by Paul prior to his conversion cried out to God when he arrived in heaven, “That’s not fair!”? When and if we arrive in heaven will we meet those we considered scoundrels and wicked and cry out to God, “That’s not fair!” We after all have a God who forgives not just 7 but 77 times. This forgiveness is God’s minimum wage to humanity. Regardless of the number of times we sin He offers us minimum wage for deciding to enter His vineyard. I can’t speak for each of you but I examine my life and say, Thank God that He is the one deciding what is fair.