

Homily – Year 7 C – February 24, 2019

That's just not fair! How's that fair? Why aren't you being fair with me? That word "fair" pops up a lot in our conversations. Children will accuse their parents of not being fair. Employees will complain that the boss is unfair. Consumers will levy the charge that corporations are not treating them fairly.

We use the term all's fair in love and war. Fair appears in so many of our expressions. Fair and balanced, fair trade, fair and square, fair enough, fair game, fair market value, fair play, fair to middling, fair-weather friend, and we refer to women as the fair sex.

So, what is fair? Well in today's first reading, in human terms, fate gave David the opportunity to fairly kill Saul. After all, Saul had been persecuting David, had treated him unjustly. In sum, Saul had been unfair to David and wanted to kill David. So, in our human way of thinking, it would have been a fair deal for David to get back at him even if it meant killing him. Wouldn't that be fair, and eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth?

But David refuses to take out Saul even though he could easily have done so. David recognized a higher value than fairness. He recognized that Saul, despite everything, was the Lord's anointed. In his own words, "I would not hurt the Lord's anointed." Fairness dictated getting even, but love of God and fidelity to God dictated sparing Saul's life. Virtue and fidelity to God trump human wisdom and the dictates of so-called acceptable human behavior.

Then, we turn to the Gospel, what is called the Sermon on the Plain, part of which we read last week. Here, Jesus quickly and efficiently upends human understanding and socially acceptable norms.

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, turn the other cheek, give without expecting back. None of that sounds very fair.

We glibly accuse ourselves or represent ourselves as Christians. When did you last concretely express your love for your enemy? When was the last time that you phoned the sister-in-law who drives you nuts? When did you last say nice things about your annoying brother or even said something flattering to him about him? When did you last loan a friend a tool without setting a date for him to bring it back?

Jesus clearly rebukes loving those who love us, loaning expecting fully to get a return, cursing back when cursed at.

You may say well, that's just not fair. Perhaps, according to our human standards none of this is fair, but Jesus is not giving lessons in fairness. Rather, he

is speaking about the kingdom, about perfection, about how we should direct our lives. He maps out what we should do. "Love and do good to your enemies. Lend expecting nothing in return. Be merciful and God extends mercy to us."

That last part should really put us on watch. Be merciful just as God shows mercy to us. Let me ask this. Would you want God to extend mercy to us the same way that we have extended it to others?

Towards the end of the gospel passage, Jesus takes away all our fun when he says: "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned." Wow! If we cannot judge, what are we going to talk about. After all, it's so much fun to judge, criticize, and even condemn others. Have you ever watched Dr. Phil, Judge Judy, Jerry Springer or political pundits? If we cannot judge and criticize, there goes our television enjoyment!

Well, I leave the decision about television up to you. But the point is clear, the disciple of Jesus knows that the Christian lives as did Christ, that is, not condemning, not judging, not seeking retribution. The closing words of today's gospel say it all: "For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." For God, fairness is measured in generosity and mercy. So, if we want God to be generous and merciful to us, we must be generous and merciful to others. That's just being fair!