

Deacon Stan's Homily for September 21, 2014 – 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel: Mt: 20: 1-16a

Fairness. Our culture values fairness. In Athletic competitions, we want the officials to be fair. If we find ourselves under an IRS audit or if someone sues us we want the decision to be fair. When we have that annual performance evaluation at work, we want that evaluation to be done fairly. And we certainly want a fair salary increase as a result of the evaluation. In the last case, we're even willing to accept a little generosity on the part of our boss.

When I was growing up, a new family moved into our neighborhood two doors down from us. There was the usual excitement of a new family. After all they had four boys and theirs was the biggest yard in the neighborhood – perfect for playing baseball or football or dodge ball or any of the games boys like to play. Bruce and Kevin were healthy. However, Mark and Dana had Duchene Muscular Dystrophy. Less was known about Muscular Dystrophy back then and at first some thought they were just slow developing. Bruce even told us Mark had extra muscles. We saw Mark regress from walking to walking with braces to a wheelchair. His brother Dana did the same a few years later. Most of the victims of this disease die before they turn twenty as the muscles continue to weaken, and eventually even the muscles that enable the victim to breathe can no longer function, and the person suffocates. Mark and Dana beat the odds living into their twenties, but it all seemed so unfair.

When I was in my twenties, I did volunteer work for the Muscular Dystrophy Association on the Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon. As Labor Day was approaching I mentioned to a coworker how unfair it was for Mark and Dana to have the disease. Chet's answer was so matter of fact, "Life's not fair". And as much as we would like things to be fair, Chet was right. Some people are more athletic; others of us aren't. Some are more intelligent; others struggle to pass some classes or even find themselves repeating them. Some have musical talent while others of us cannot sing a note. But even if we can't sing, God wants to hear our voices raised in prayer. Yet all the gifts or talents we have received from God have been given to us to share. They're not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of all of us.

Most of us would see some unfairness in today's Gospel parable. But as Isaiah tells us in the first reading, God's ways are not our ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above ours. Mother Teresa is infinitely happy in heaven, but so is St. Dismas. Not familiar with that name? Dismas is the name we have given to the

crucified man who turned to his dying Lord and asked to be remembered. I once heard the comment that he even stole his ticket to heaven. Should a man who turns to God as he is dying have the same infinite happiness as someone who served the poor almost her entire adult life? Well, God's ways are not our ways. If we want to see the ultimate unfairness, we just need to look behind the altar. What could be more unfair than torturing the most innocent, the most loving man who ever walked the earth to death? Yet this redemptive act was necessary for Mother Teresa, St. Dismas, and with the grace of God you and I to enjoy that infinite happiness of heaven. God's ways are not our ways.

Isaiah also tells us to "Seek the Lord while he may be found". We have already encountered the Lord in the Scriptures we read. We will soon encounter him in the Eucharist. And as I tell the ladies Fran and I minister to in the jails, we encounter Jesus in each other, especially the poor and the vulnerable. If we cannot see Jesus in those around us, we need to expand our search. Never forget Jesus' promise, "Whatever you did for the least of my brethren, you did for me."

The last two weeks Fr George has been preaching to us about stewardship, specifically our time. Let's ask ourselves, "What have I done to share my time with those in need?" We have so many opportunities. We can visit the incarcerated, the hospitalized, the homebound, even bringing Jesus in the Eucharist to them. We can help an elderly neighbor or a struggling classmate. The Knights of Columbus held a membership drive last week. If you didn't come to our information night last Thursday, it's not too late to check us out. And Barbara is still looking for some REP teachers.

We have been told that as Christians we have been baptized into Christ's threefold role of priest, prophet, and king. But Jesus told us he came to serve, not to be served. So as his followers we need to live that role as well. Then when we finally meet Jesus, not in the Scriptures or the Eucharist or each other, but in all his risen glory, we might hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant".