

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

Brothers and sisters, I hate to say this, but it needs to be said: Life isn't fair. Deep down, we know it's true, but when we're on the wrong side of "fair," it's a miserable truth to bear. It's almost "unjust and wrong."

Look to our Gospel for today. Keep in mind that Jesus is teaching this parable to His own apostles, who passionately believed that they deserved greater heavenly treasures and better treatment from God because they gave up everything to follow Him. Jesus had just finished saying that the littlest children will inherit the kingdom of heaven and that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter into heaven. The disciples were troubled by all this. Peter pipes up: "What about us? We've left everything to follow you. Don't we deserve better?" Jesus responds with this parable. Talk about troubling. Everybody gets the same wage, even though some worked all day, from the beginning, and some barely did any work? I realize that's a very popular platform in today's political culture, but if you've ever had to earn a paycheck, you know how wrong/offensive that concept is. For those of you in school, change "wage" to "grade." Everyone gets the same grade, even though some work hard and some don't. That's not right, is it? That's not fair!

But is that really the lesson we should glean from this text: Like everything else in life, God isn't fair either? Jesus Himself says that the Master in the parable very plainly tells the disgruntled workers that He most certainly was fair in His dealing with them. He gave them exactly what He told them He would. They knew what they were getting into before they even began. And, He's free to do what He wants with His money, and He agreed from the onset to give everyone a denarius, whether they worked all day or just a few minutes. Is that fair?

Paul picks up on this in the epistle lesson, although he comes at it from a different perspective. He points to the rebellious and thankless Old Testament Israelites and how God dealt fairly with them, in spite of their wicked and undeserving ways. Paul specifically points to how God brought each and every one of them—not just the “good” ones or the “deserving” ones—out of Pharaoh’s bondage and into the promised land. All of them were recipients of His undeserved grace and love. And still...many of them complained.

This is why Paul says that God wasn’t pleased with them. God “unfairly” showed His love and grace to everyone...and still so many rejected Him all along the way – perishing not just physically but eternally. You need to think about that. They all participated, but so few finished the race of faith. Few held fast to God in faith, which is why so many perished. “You are not saved by works, lest anyone should boast. You are saved through faith alone in God’s grace alone.” Anything else would make God unjust and unfair.

And it is precisely here that we can rightly speak in terms of fairness. St. Paul tells us in Romans 3 that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and the wages for that sin is death.” All means that everyone is a sinner and everyone justly and fairly deserves temporal and eternal punishment for that sin in the eyes of God. Remember: Sin isn’t just what you do; it’s who you are, by nature. As children of Adam, we are all sinners.

But this is where the “unfair fairness” of God bursts through into the wonderful Gospel reality that He freely gives His grace and forgiveness to everyone, especially to those who don’t deserve it (which is everyone). Isn’t unfairness what mercy and grace are really all about? If you remember, mercy is defined as not receiving what you do deserve, and grace is understood as receiving something you absolutely

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do not deserve. When you think about it, there's nothing fair at all about mercy or grace! Thanks be to God!

You want to talk about unfair? Jesus Christ, the innocent and perfect Son of God died for the sins of the entire world; not just for the "good" or the elect. Remember: God so loved the whole world—not just the elect or the "good" or the "deserving"—that He sent His only-begotten Son to die for it. That means that Christ died for EVERYONE. Our heavenly Father gave to Jesus all that we deserved, and He gave to us all that we don't deserve. That's the very epitome of mercy and grace. That's God's mercy, grace, and love for you.

When you really think about it (especially as we prepare for Lent), God's not fair at all, and that's a good thing. All are equally damned sinners in His eyes, and all are equally saved and redeemed in His eyes because of saving faith alone in Christ's death and resurrection alone. And still...so many reject and doubt and turn their backs and their hard hearts on Him. He made His Son take the fall and punishment for the whole world so that all of us could have eternal life with Him. Thank God that He is lovingly and mercifully unfair to us because of Jesus Christ.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Rejoice that our lives with Him are not fair at all! May this same sense of true Christian unfairness be the font and source, the rock and anchor of your faith, your hope, and your peace. Be with Christ, right where He calls you to be; right where He promises to be...unconditionally. Hold fast to Christ, even as you run your race and make your way through this hostile wilderness we call "life," for here is Christ, in your midst. Run the race set before you. Run in faith until God mercifully says your race is finished. Run and rejoice and ever hold fast in faith to this Rock and Trophy of Salvation—your Rock and Trophy of Salvation.

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May this Christ-centered mercy and grace give you peace; the peace that is known only through trusting in God's loving and complete unfairness. May this same peace of Christ guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him alone, now and into all eternity.

In His name...AMEN