

September 27, 2020 | 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

[EZ 18:25-28](#)

[PS 25:4-9,10,14](#)

[PHIL 2:1-11 or 1-5](#)

[MT 21:28-32](#)

By Dianne Bergant, CSA

“The Lord’s way is not fair!” So reports the prophet Ezekiel in today’s first reading. This is a hard saying, some might even claim that it is blasphemous. However, look around the world: innocent vulnerable people are stricken by an invisible virus; an entire race of people have been politically, socially, geographically, medically, religiously, etc, pushed to the margins of society; the next generation will inherit polluted air, toxic soil, acid rain, and decimated wildlife. What did these people do to deserve this? Something or someone is not fair.

The response to this claim is similarly hard: “...rather, are not your ways unfair?” Now, this accusation is certainly true. Human greed, bigotry, and selfishness are at the root of most of these evils. While the devastating virus itself might not be attributed to human behavior, many maintain that our disregard for the delicate balance of natural forces contributed to the virus ’outburst at this time.

As the reading continues it suggests that if we change our wicked ways, we will live. This is the classic example of the theory of retribution which alleges that the good will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. Unfortunately, this does not always happen in life. Good people do suffer, sometimes terribly; at times it seems that crime does pay. And so we are thrown back onto the opening statement: “The Lord’s way is not fair!” No, it is not. But that does not necessarily mean that God is unfair. It probably means that God’s ways are incomprehensible. Now that is not a hard statement to accept; everyone admits to it. Then they try to force that incomprehensibility into the framework of our sense of justice, and God comes out looking unfair. So how are we to understand this prophetic message? And what are we to do in the chaotic world of which we are a part?

The uncomplicated statements of strict retribution are probably meant to be descriptions of the intended orderliness of life. Such retributive statements function in one of two ways. They either promise rewards for acting appropriately (If you’re good...), or they warn of the dire consequences of unseemly behavior (If you do that...). It is here is where one of the most wondrous of God’s gifts enters, namely, free will. We can decide to conform or to rebel. If we are responsible for social injustice and/or ecological damage – and we are, we can change our behavior and work to repair – and we must.

The virus seems to be one of so many factors in life for which we are not necessarily responsible and over which we might not have absolute control. Still, because of it, innocent people suffer and die, while those who disregard health precautions appear to move effortlessly through

society. It is not fair. No, it is not. Our inability to correct all of the unevenness of life throws us back onto our human vulnerability as participants in a world that contemporary scientists describe as unfinished. The question 'why' brings us back to the incomprehensibility of God. We will never really understand. All we can do is trust that God knows what God is doing. Easy to say? Yes, but very hard to do

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