

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time *September 27, 2020*

“Thus says the Lord: You say, ‘The Lord’s way is not fair!’ Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?” (Ezekiel 18:25)

At first glance, the beginning of today’s first reading may seem a tad bit confusing. This confusion could lead us to agree with the house of Israel. Are the Lord’s ways fair? When we see good people suffering and not so good people celebrating, then yes, most definitely, the ways of the Lord appear unfair. However, this has nothing to do with the complaint the Lord was actually addressing.

To understand what was taking place, we must turn our Bibles to the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel chapter 18:21-32. These verses were a reply to a question which arose from the doctrine of personal retribution. This doctrine could be stated thus: “If a known sinner must live with the consequences of their sins, what would be the purpose of their needing to repent?” We might rephrase this question to the following: “If I am still going to be punished, no matter if I have apologized or not, for a bad action done, then why should I apologize to begin with?” To be fair, the person who committed the bad action may not feel sorry for the action. In fact, they might have even considered the action to be a pleasurable one. For example, we have been told drinking a bit of wine daily could be beneficial for our health. A person drinks wine because they like to. It gives them pleasure. They realize that too much wine will intoxicate them and, if you have ever been drunk on wine or any other alcoholic beverage, you can apologize all you want the next morning as you hold on to the toilet waiting for the world to stop spinning, but you still have to suffer with the hangover. So why apologize?

The reason we apologize, according to Ezekiel and later our own Catholic Faith, is not based upon our feelings. Honestly, if we had felt sorry for the action, we would not have undertaken the action to begin with. If we are honest, we enjoyed the action. We found pleasure in it. That is why we did it. This is a rather selfish way to look at our actions because we are only considering our feelings. Rarely, does one consider God’s feelings or the feelings of those we love before acting. If we had considered the hurt, shame, or embarrassment our loved ones would experience, would that be enough to stop us from acting no matter how pleasurable the action would be to us? Most importantly, the questions and grief loved ones could feel if our quest for pleasure had resulted in our unfortunate demise. Do we ever stop to consider before we act?

God reminds us, through Ezekiel, that no matter our feelings or the consequences of our actions, He is always ready to forgive. He is always ready to show us His Mercy. Even if the asking forgiveness comes through a “death bed confession,” He is always ready to forgive. He does this because He is Our Father. He is that scorned parent sitting at the side of our bed with tears in His eyes watching us suffer for our choices waiting to hear those words “Daddy, I am sorry.” And, ever so quick to respond, “It is OK now my child, I love you, I forgive you.”