

Homily 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time - September 28, 2008

Ezekiel 18:25-18

Philippians 2:1-11

Matthew 21:28-32

The scripture from Ezekiel asks, "Whose way is fair?"

Good question! And a contemporary question, too.

-What's the fair and just way to settle the present economic crisis?

-What's the fair and just resolution of competing rights in the abortion debate?

-What will bring a fair and just conclusion to the war in Iraq?

-What's the fair and just response to questions about aliens and immigration?

These are big issues and there are no easy answers to any of them.

How do we determine what's fair? What's just in God's eyes?

Do Christians determine fairness and justice differently than others do?

We've all found ourselves saying at one time or another:

"Hey, that's not fair!"

but often what we really mean is,

"Hey, you're not being fair to *me!*"

Too often, what I determine to be fair is what I think is fair

for *me*, for *my* needs;

or for *us*, for *my* family, for *our* side,

for *our* country, for *our* best interests.

We honor the scales of justice,

but we'd prefer that the balance of fairness tip at least a little,

to our wants and will, our desires and demands.

When my sister and I were children

and it came to sharing an extra dessert,

or the last cookie in the jar, or a Snickers Bar,

my mother would always say,

"OK - one of you gets to cut the Snickers in two,

and the other one gets to choose first between the two pieces."

Imagine the precision and caution

as one of us cut that candy bar in two,

being oh-so-careful that neither piece

was the slightest bit larger than the other.

When I was the one cutting the Snickers in half

I made sure of two things:

(1) *that got my fair share, and*

(2) *that she didn't get a speck more than her fair share.*

So, was that fair? Indeed it was.

If nothing else, it was equal.
Is that what the Lord asks of us?
Oh, it should be so easy! But it's not.
What the Lord asks is much more demanding.

Being fair and just in the Christian scheme of things
is more than just dividing things down the middle,
even if, in many instances, that would be a step forward.

Rather, Christian justice calls us to offer more than a fair share,
more than an equal share to the other person, especially
if the other is *poor, defenseless, oppressed or marginalized*.

To return to my childhood illustration:
Had my sister and I been Christian in sharing the Snickers Bar,
I would have cut the two pieces with one larger than the other,
offering her the opportunity to have more than a fair share,
and she, choosing the first piece, would have taken the smaller one.

And my-oh-MY but that goes against the grain!

(And no, my sister and I never did it that way!)

But that's just what the Lord asks us to do:
to go beyond the inclinations of self-interest and to put the other first,
or as St. Paul put it today,
*Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves,
each looking out not for your own interests,
but also for those of others.*

I don't intend, with my candy bar theology,
to trivialize the questions
of an economic crisis, abortion, war and immigration.
It's just that the options in dividing a candy-bar
do have larger application.
Our faith, our God, our God's vision of what's fair and just
call us beyond our own needs and wants, and often radically so.

As we prepare to make decisions this November,
we could do worse than contemplate a Snickers Bar
and how, and how much of it, we might be willing to share.

*(The baskets at the foot of the altar are filled with little Snickers bars
and I hope each of you will take one as you leave here today.
They're small, but you can still share them.
Parents might use them to help children understand
what we're talking about here.
And even if you eat your Snickers in the car on the way home,*

*I hope you'll save the wrapper and keep it in a place where,
between now and November,
you can contemplate a Snickers bar as you make some decisions.)*

They say a good marriage isn't built by the spouses each giving 50%
but rather by each spouse striving to give 100%.

They also say that the church is the bride of Christ
and he the bridegroom.

We pray each week in the shadow of our loving bridegroom
giving 100% of all that he had – for us.

At this altar we are nourished by his giving more than his fair share.
The Lord let himself be broken, poured out, divided and emptied,
taking nothing for himself and giving everything to us.

May the generous share of his love which is ours in this sacrament
move us to give even nearly as generously to others, and especially to
the poor, the defenseless, the oppressed, and the marginalized.

- Rev. Austin Fleming