

When was the last time you approached God with a question regarding fairness? When was the last time you wondered aloud to God why some people's lives are somehow better or worse than your own? In the Gospel passage, we have a landowner who hires groups of workers, at different times in the day, to work in his vineyard. The first group begins work at dawn. The second group begins work later that morning. The third group begins work at noon. The last group in the late afternoon. At the end of the day, the landowner pays them all the same. Our sense of justice would side with the group of workers who were there all day. Why should those who only worked an hour be paid the same as those who worked all day? You know who really understands the dilemma that the parable gives us? Children! Children have finely honed justice radars built into their systems. Parents know about this built in justice radar all too well. Whenever the justice radar in a child gets triggered, a child can be the first to say the words we hear in every household, "It's not fair!" When we listen to Jesus' parable of those who only work an hour getting paid the same as those who worked all day, the child inside of us wants to cry out "It's not fair". In the presence of God, we're all like children. In response, the Lord says "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways." God is a parent dealing with kids.

When we think of the word justice, we think of what's rightfully due us and due others. This is a reasonable definition. There's a lot of social injustice in our world that needs to be recognized, addressed, and fought against. As Catholics, we're called to fight for justice, with conviction, with a preferential option for the poor, and a spirit of non-violence like Jesus did. However, we must be careful that our fairness radars don't turn our quest for "justice" into "just us" or "just me"? That's how we sinners operate. The historical context behind Jesus' parable has to do with how the Church in the first century regarded converts. The Jews were the first in the "story of salvation", so the question in the early Church became: how do we treat all the non-Jews, who were called Gentiles, who want to join the Church? Should they first become Jewish before becoming Christian? The Good News is whether we find ourselves in the story of salvation early or late, God loves us equally and wants us to receive the same gift of salvation offered to all regardless of where we live, where we we're born.

When was the last time you approached God with a question regarding fairness? When was the last time you wondered aloud to God why some people's lives are somehow better or worse than your own? There's injustice in our world that Jesus expects us to stand up against and become forces for change. However, before we go about doing that, it's best to remember that, biblically speaking, justice wasn't narrowly defined as fairness between people, although that's part of it. Biblically speaking, justice was about people being in right relationship with God. When we work for justice in this world, we must not lose sight of God's commentary regarding justice behind me on the wall. Is that fair? I think if we spent enough time contemplating the cross, we might come to a different conclusion as to what's just in God's eyes. We all have our gifts, we all have our struggles, and we all have our crosses to carry. However, if we convert our hearts to Jesus, what good news it is to know that His gift of salvation is available to all regardless of who we are or where we live. Perhaps the best way for Christians to define justice isn't "just us" or "just me" but "just Jesus".