

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's reading from Isaiah contains some of God's most challenging words to us: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.*" The parable in today's Gospel illustrates the truth of God's words.

Jesus begins by saying the "*the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner.*" The landowner went out at dawn to hire day laborers for his vineyard for the usual daily wage. In other words, he entered into a verbal contract with them. However, when he went out at 9:00 a.m. to hire more laborers, he told them, "*I will give you what is just.*" without specifying the amount. He then goes out at noon, 3 p.m., and 5:00 p.m. In other words, some worked 12 hours, some, 9 hours, some, 6 hours, some 3 hours, and some, only one hour. The commentary in the lector's workbook suggests that the landowner thought that those who still had not been hired by 5 p.m. were just standing around and not trying all that hard to be hired.

The twist in the story comes when it is time for the workers to be paid. The landowner tells the foreman to pay them beginning with those who worked only one hour and ending with those who worked 12 hours. Each was paid for a full day. When the ones who worked twelve hours were paid, they expected to be paid more. As one might expect, when they received the same amount as those who only worked one hour, they grumbled, but the landowner reminded them that they were paid the amount to which they had agreed.

My guess is that most of us would identify with the workers who worked 12 hours. We would have wanted, expected, to be paid more than someone who worked only one hour. However, this is the point of the parable. God's justice is much different from ours. The alternate opening prayer for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time in the former Sacramentary began, "Lord our God, in you justice and mercy meet." One might even argue that God's justice and God's mercy are one and the same.

If God's justice and mercy are different from our ideas of justice and mercy, we need to look at our ideas of justice, especially economic justice. This is a good time to be asking questions because of the Hollywood writer's strike and the UAW strike against the car manufacturers. Overall, I really believe that our country has done as well as it has because we have had a large middle class. I am not sure this is true any longer. The gap between the rich and everyone else has grown tremendously. For example, I heard one auto worker comment that the CEO of the company where he works makes more in one day than he does in a year. Is that just? Also, it seems to me that justice would be better served if businesses and labor were cooperative rather than adversarial. "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.*"

Last Sunday there was a newspaper article about how corporations are buying up houses in Indianapolis and therefore making it much more difficult and more expensive for ordinary people to buy homes. Is that just? "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.*"

Finally, is it just when the cost of medicines, especially older medicines, keeps rising, making them unaffordable for many people? Diabetes medicines would be one example although serious efforts seem to have been made to lower their cost. "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.*"

My brothers and sisters, it seems to me that it is not enough that we personally act justly toward others, I think we also need to be concerned about issues of justice and injustice within our larger society and in the world.