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The Generosity of God

by: Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D., *Catholic Author and Speaker*



“But that’s not fair!” Most parents have heard this phrase umpteen times. The notion of fairness also known as justice, is built into us. It makes us aware that each of us has certain rights that need to be respected.

But it also means that we each have duties. If others have the right to be paid for their work, those who benefit from that work have the duty to pay them. If others have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we have the duty not to let our pursuit of happiness infringe on their rights.

But we have to widen our perspective a bit. God, the creator of all, is responsible for all the blessings we enjoy. Life in this world was given to each of us as an undeserved, free gift. We have unequal physical talents, features, and abilities, plus diverse spiritual and intellectual gifts as well. They vary a lot from person to person, but what they all have in common is that they come as free gifts from God who didn’t have to create any of us.

This is the necessary background to fully understand a parable that at first shocks our sensibilities. Matthew (20:1-16) records a story of an employer who hires workmen to harvest grapes. He hires members of the crew at various times of the day, so that at the end of the day, some have only worked a few hours while others have worked all day long. There’s grumbling when everyone is paid the same standard day’s wage, regardless of how long they worked. To add insult to injury, those who started last got paid first. “No fair!”



Wait a minute. The master paid those who worked all day exactly what he told them they’d get. He just decided to be generous and pay everybody, even the latecomers, a full day’s wage. Justice does not preclude generosity.

The Pharisees thought that they had always done the will of God and deserved more than the rest, especially the rabble Jesus appeared to favor—including tax collectors and

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sinner. It roiled them to think that these Johnny-come-lately's would sit along them in the Kingdom of God.

Truth be told, neither they, nor any of us, are really like the folks who consistently did the will of the Master, working uninterruptedly at the assigned task. Our assigned job is to love the Lord our God with ALL our heart, ALL our soul, and ALL of our strength (Deut 6:4-5) every day of our life. This is only fair since we owe God absolutely everything. But we've all unfairly walked off the job at various moments—thumbing our noses at him through our disobedience, pride, and selfishness. Some have gone AWOL longer than others, and some's sins are more spectacular than others. But the bottom line is that, in terms of strict justice, God does not owe any of us anything except, perhaps, punishment.

But in his extraordinary generosity, the Lord has offered us a deal—if we will accept His beloved Son in faith as Savior and Lord, and through the power of the Spirit seek to do His will, and if we will repent each time we fail, He will give us what we do not deserve—friendship with Him here that opens out to eternal glory hereafter. The first takers for this offer have typically been those most aware of their need for mercy. And this is why the last have usually been first when it comes to the Kingdom of God.

Seems fair to me.



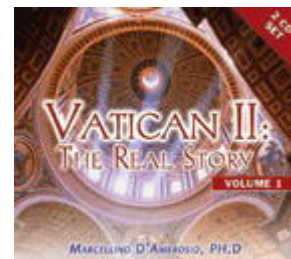
This was originally published in [Our Sunday Visitor](#) as a reflection upon the readings for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, liturgical cycle A (Is 55 6-9), Ps 145, Phil 1:20-24, 27; Mt 20:1-16). It is reproduced here with the permission of the author.

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