

A while back I saw a priest wearing a t-shirt which said in bold orange caution letters: "Warning: Anything you say may be used in a homily." Obviously that does not apply to the sacrament of Confession but it does apply to all other forms of communication and no one is exempt. I have had a number of conversations recently and thought: "That needs to go into a homily." Right now, everyone who has spoken to me in the past couple of weeks is freaking out. As Mr Burns says on "The Simpsons," "Eeeeexceeeeeeellleeeent!!!" A couple of the conversations I had this week--and it is one that I have had a number of other times so don't take too much credit (or blame) upon yourselves--revolved around the notion that God is not fair. Innocent people suffer. God let the martyrs die horrible deaths. Jesus died the most horrific death possible. If God was fair, he wouldn't let those bad things happen.

Another aspect of God's "injustice" is that Jesus tells us that he is the way, the truth and the life. The only way to the father—which could be code words for eternity in heaven—is through him. But there are people all over the world who, through no fault of their own, don't know Jesus. Can they not be saved? The Church addresses that through the doctrine of baptism of desire—I'll come back to this in a couple weeks because it opens up a whole other can of worms.

As I was praying with these questions and today's scriptures, two names popped into my head: John Chapman and Peter Parker. They may not be immediately recognizable to you now because they are the secret identities of their more famous alter-egos, but you'll understand it better in a while.

Where do we see God's supposed "injustice" in the scriptures? The prophet Amos was sent to Israel and its corrupt king and leaders to warn them that unless they repented of their sins and crimes against God and man, Israel would be destroyed. They didn't repent and the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed. While the leaders brought this judgment down upon themselves, what about the innocent people who suffered alongside them? How could a just God let that happen? In the gospel, Jesus sent the apostles out two by two to work mighty deeds in his name and preach repentance. Matthew tells us that they were also to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. In simple terms, that proclamation combined with the mighty deeds meant that the long-awaited messiah had arrived and that if the people wanted to experience the salvation that came with the messiah, they had to repent. Well, twelve men going out in pairs means they could only go to six towns—what about everyone else? Were they denied that knowledge and the possibility of salvation? Finally, God the

Father's "injustice" is supposedly shown in the second reading when Paul says that Jesus—an innocent man—shed his blood for our transgressions.

Working our way backwards now. Jesus' death on the cross for our sins was not an unjust punishment upon Jesus. Jesus freely chose to take our sins upon himself to pay the price for those sins so that we can have the hope of spending eternity in heaven. The cross is an act of love because had Jesus not done that for us, we would have no hope of salvation.

The sending of the apostles. What about those people who lived outside of the towns the six pairs visited? Were they just out of luck? This is where John Chapman comes in. He was born in Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1774. As an adult, he moved ahead of the frontier planting seeds to grow apple orchards. John Chapman is better known as Johnny Appleseed. That is what the apostles were doing. They were planting seeds of faith. As those seeds began to grow, more people came to know about Jesus. People in those towns also began to teach about Jesus. From those few seeds, the kingdom of heaven began to grow. This growth would not really mature until after Pentecost. People come to know Jesus through his disciples—which include us. Seeds of faith are planted in each of us. We have a duty to bear fruit and in turn help spread more seeds. By the way, this is why the martyrs are so important—their blood planted the seeds of faith in many lands.

What about people who suffer unjustly? There are a number of different ways to look at that. There is God's answer to Job which was basically—"Trust me, I know what I am doing better than you do." There is also the eschatological orientation of the Beatitudes which promises better things in the next life for those who suffer in this life. However, the Beatitudes are not just directed towards the end times (that is what eschatology means), but they also mean something in the here and now—which is where Peter Parker comes in. When asked, "Why are you the friendly neighbor Spider-Man," Peter replied, "Mr Stark, when you can do the things that I can, but you don't and then the bad things happen, they happen because of you." That isn't exactly right. The modified Peter Parker Principle goes something like this: "When you can do the things I can, and you see bad things happening but don't act, then you are part of the problem."

When we see something and say, "That's not fair" we have a duty to act on it according to the gifts God has given us. This also applies to our duties as seed planters—evangelists. If we allow injustice—in whatever form it takes—to continue, is it God who is unfair? Or is it us? That God allows suffering is going to be a hard, unanswerable mystery but it is also an invitation. We can unite our

own sufferings to Jesus' sufferings on the cross and let him put them to a good use. When we see suffering, we can step into the breach and do what we can to alleviate the suffering—in doing so we are no longer part of the problem. We become—with Jesus' help—part of the solution. We do this according to the individual gifts God has given us, no matter how big or how small. If nothing else, we can also pray, fast, and offer what sacrifices we can for the good of those who need our help.

God is the source of all justice, goodness, and love. Jesus is inviting us to be Johnny and Janey Appleseed by planting the seeds of the explosive good news of the gospel in a world that needs to hear it. Jesus is also inviting us to fight against injustice, to be Spider-People, by using the things we can do to prevent bad things and to help each other when bad things do happen.

How are you going to respond to Jesus' invitation?