

God of Justice

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God's justice according to the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Testaments focus on right relationship with each other, a precondition to have good relationship with God, especially the weak, the orphan, the widow, etc. "God hears the cry of the oppressed" in today's jargon God listens the grievances of "the marginalized or those on social, economic and political peripheries." The Hebrew prophets up to John the Baptist preached to practice justice and compassion towards the powerless and defenseless, even offering a cup of cold water to a thirsty person is an act of justice. The marginalized have special place in God's heart. God pays attention with compassion to those "who serve God willingly" and unconditionally.

In the Gospel reading Jesus uses a parable of two people who present themselves before the Lord. Not both had the right disposition before God. The first reading says, "The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds." We need to humble and submit ourselves before God. The tax collector, socially speaking is a public sinner, acknowledging his sinfulness, submits himself saying, "O God be merciful to me a sinner." However, the Pharisee, who knows the laws and the prophets approached God with a sense of entitlement, arrogance and quid pro quo. The Pharisee exalts himself distinguishing from the rest of humanity, "I am not like the rest of humanity greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector." How many times have we found ourselves distinguishing ourselves as righteous and despising others as less than us? The Pharisee despises the tax collector and considers himself as God's favorite person unlike the sinner one. How many times we have behaved like the Pharisee in our relationship with each other, especially with those whom we find less adequate even of physical and intellectual abilities.

We cannot adequately stand before God on our own merit. We are always short of God's grace, but God gives us without measure and unconditionally. We are beneficiaries of God's love and compassion. "Lord have mercy" is a customary expression in the African American community and in the Eastern Christian tradition, "Lord have mercy" is a mantra of prayer – which runs throughout at Mass or other liturgical prayers. This practice comes from the early church acknowledging our inadequacy before God. We can only stand before Him because of his mercy. We are expected to respond to his unconditional mercy showered on us and the rest of humanity.

The preferential option for the poor in the Church's mission is to be a sign of hope and inspiration to lift up the downtrodden. These are the people, who God pays special attention, hearing their cry and grievances. If we really serve God willingly, we cannot be oblivious to our brother or sister in dire need or we cannot present ourselves as better than them. We all are created in the image and likeness of God, still in need of realizing God's redemptive work in us. In the second reading though St. Paul seems to be bragging that a crown of victory is waiting for him. His imminent victory emanates from his participation in the suffering of Christ. He was like the despised tax collector treated as the refuse of society or troublemaker; therefore, undeserving to live. We witness again and again in our justice system ready to treat people as throw aways, imprisoning people without the hope for rehabilitation and reintegration into the society. Many States use capital punishment without any reservation while claiming to be prolife. We cannot pick and choose God's laws or play favoritism, claiming as God's will.