

24th Sunday C (Luke 15:1-10)

“It’s not fair!” How many times have we uttered, or heard that cry of despair? It emerges from the back seat of the family car when squabbling siblings argue over room on the seat, or portions of the snacks. “It’s not fair!” This is the cry from the funeral home when someone we love dies too soon. It is very much the cry as people reflect on the horrible destruction of human life on September 11, 2001, or when an earthquake devastates Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world, or why a gas pipeline suddenly explodes in San Bruno and people die and are injured, and many homes are lost. Why isn’t life fair? Why do some people get the breaks, while others get broken? Why do some couples have children while others go childless? Why do some people live long and healthy lives while smoking and drinking and eating fatty food, while others die young, even though they exercise regularly and eat only bran and raw vegetables? Why do undeserving people get on airplanes that are doomed to destruction? Why does evil seem to triumph over good and why does death and suffering seem to triumph over life and the promise of hope? Why does violence blot out the message and human desire for peace? It’s just not fair!

How does God view fairness and a lack of fairness? How does God view tragedy? How does God view acts of inhuman terror against those who were created in God’s image? As we reflect, we become aware of the growing global incapacity to recognize the Spirit of God in each other, the sanctity of each human being. We can see that some people are willing to hurt each other to advance their own interests, and this has become a global problem. We may tell ourselves that violence has nothing to do with the way some have learned to close their ears when they are told of the universal problem of starvation and homelessness of so many, and the high number of refugees in the world. We may not see the connection of violence with American corporations running sweatshops in poor countries, or the plight of Palestinian refugees in their own land, or suicide bombers targeting Israelis. When people are treated as means to an end and are dehumanized, we create a world where violence may take place, and unless conditions change, more violence will take place in the future.

As we observe Jesus in today’s Gospel, we note that he is criticized for welcoming sinners and eating with them. Jesus gives us an insight into God’s heart, God’s sheer mercy and unconditional love, and it’s too much for his critics, for they intend to kill him. He sets the example for non-violence based on love of those less fortunate. As we gather today, let us pray for victims and families of those who have been hurt or murdered. We must also pray that America will turn to a period of reflection, getting back in touch with our common humanity, asking ourselves how our institutions can best embody our highest values, that every human life is sacred, that we must create a world of love, healing, and caring, where social justice, love and compassion are so prevalent that violence becomes only a distant memory. For this we pray.

Al Grosskopf, S.J.