

The Cry for Justice

When I served as a priest in Pennsylvania, a parishioner of mine by the name of George managed accounts for a manufacturing firm. His work required him to travel throughout the northeast United States and to southern Ontario, Canada. It was demanding work that took a toll on his health, but he loved his job, and he was good at it.

Then, one day while being with a customer, George suffered a heart attack. Thankfully, it was not fatal, but he had to be transported back to Pennsylvania where he spent time in the hospital. The last thing he and his wife were worried about was medical insurance. After all, he had a good plan with his company.

But his boss, who lived in Florida, decided that George was expendable and that the cost of maintaining him on the payroll was no longer viable. So, he was terminated.

George shared the news with me from his hospital bed. Being a pastor, I tried to comfort him, but I also advised him to get an attorney and take legal action. George protested: "But I am a Christian and I don't want to sue." I replied, "George, the only way for you to get justice is to take your case to court." He took my advice and after the case went to court, the company finally settled. George was reinstated with full backpay. The company also paid his medical expenses. George stayed with that company until he retired. After a happy retirement, George died this year.

When you hear George's story, if you are like me, you are incensed at the callous indifference to human suffering that people have to the sick and vulnerable. It is unjust, unfair – we instinctively know that. It goes against standards of decency and compassion.

The cry for justice is as old as humanity itself. Sometimes we demand justice from other human beings. Sometimes we fight against a system that ignores or demeans us. Sometimes we cry out to God that we are being mistreated when we are trying to live good and decent lives.

In the Book of Job, we read of a man who lived by the rules. He was a good man, but he went through one misery after another – he lost his wealth, his children and finally his health. He cries out to God, “Lord, this is not fair. Where is your justice when an innocent man like me suffers so much?”

Justice is the age-old cry of humanity against tyranny, sickness, and disease, against the heavy-handedness of government and the meanness of human beings.

Today we scratch our heads and wonder how a country as noble as the United States could have allowed slavery until a civil war finally ended it, or how labor strife was so prevalent in our country in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. People struggle for justice even today – you can name your own cause. The cry for justice is the yearning of people to be treated justly, fairly and with respect.

In our gospel, Jesus said there was a certain city judge who had neither reverence for God nor respect for people. There was in the same city a widow who kept coming to him every day saying, “Give me justice, vindicate me against my opponent.” The judge paid no attention to the widow until finally he said, “I’m going to have to listen to her lest she wears me out with this continual knocking on my door.”

Then Jesus added a moral to this little story: “And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?” God is a just God.

But if God is just, then why do so many terrible things happen to good people? Why were 1200 Jews murdered on October 7, 2023, just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time? Where is the justice for the people of Ukraine, as Russia decimates their country, or for the women of Afghanistan and Iran who have few rights and are required to wear garb covering their bodies, or for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza who are now trying to rebuild homes from rubble? Where is justice for people who are treated unfairly by their bosses at work, or the elderly who are defrauded by scammers, or those who cannot get proper medical care when their life depends on it?

I was once asked to visit a woman in the hospital whose priest was on vacation. She was middle-aged, thoughtful, and terribly angry with God. She was battling a rare type of cancer that had resulted in both legs being amputated.

Chemotherapy and experimental drugs had worn down her body, and at best she should hope to spend the rest of her life as a disabled person. She was angry because she expected to live out the good genes of her mother who had lived to the age of 94. She was also terribly afraid because she had an adult son with special needs whom she felt her husband could not care for alone. While waiting for the results of still more tests, she said to me, "I am just hanging on. I do not know what else to do."

Life is sometimes just hanging on, isn't it? We keep faith by hanging on by our fingernails, because that is just the way life is. Hanging on – sometimes that is the only way to survive, because whoever is faithful until death, whoever holds on to the end will be saved.

One of my favorite lawyer films is the 1982 movie *The Verdict*. Paul Newman plays Frank Galvin, a once capable lawyer, who down on his luck has become a self-centered, worthless drunk. As the movie opens, a well-meaning friend has pushed a medical negligence case Galvin's way. The friend can only hope that Galvin will be able to settle out of court for enough to satisfy the plaintiff's family and get his practice back on track. But after visiting the comatose plaintiff, Galvin decides he will take the case to court. Whether she will be aware of it or not, the brain-damaged woman deserves to be heard.

It is not a popular decision. The family is unhappy when they learn Galvin has turned down a \$210,000 settlement. It is a decision Galvin will regret more than once. For he will find himself arguing the case before a judge who dislikes him and against a lawyer, described (accurately) by his friend as "a prince of darkness."

By trial's end, Galvin is at his wits' end, left with nothing but his irrevocable decision to press on, to see that this dumb and deaf and helpless woman receives the justice she deserves. She may be comatose, but the court will still hear her voice.

The cry for justice is to keep going, like the widow in the gospel, pounding on the judge's door with bloody knuckles, demanding her case be heard and unwillingly to settle for anything less. You keep going. You do not quit in the face of opposition. You do not give up in the face of setbacks. You do not lose heart no matter what the odds. And why? Because justice will be done.

Mark it down. Justice will be done. As sure as there is a God, the innocent shall not suffer forever. There will come a time when God's justice will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And so, with all the struggles and obstacles and challenges before us, Jesus tells us to keep the faith.

Yes, I know, injustice persists in our world today, but progress has been made over time – improvements in racial equality, labor conditions, and tribal rights. And yes, we are still struggling with medical care, immigration, and other issues, but we do not give up. We do not give in to despair or cynicism. We keep banging on the judge's door demanding justice. We may want God to speed up the progress, but God acts according to his time and in his way. The fact that our vision is limited, finite, unable to see the end from the beginning, somehow escapes our mind. So, we complain; we get frustrated; we accuse God of being indifferent to us; we do not live by faith. And yet, the world is slowly, surely, and unevenly moving in the way of God's justice. After all, who could have imagined peace in the Middle East, but it is now more possible than ever before in history.

I still remember the end of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe. One by one the Eastern bloc of Communist countries collapsed, and a new birth of freedom took its place. Go with me to Prague in the Czech Republic in November 1989. Students in the streets began chanting to the Communist leadership, "You have lost already! You have lost already!" They chanted these words even though the ultimate victory was still in the future. "We know that we can win," said the leader of the demonstrations, "this is unstoppable."

He was right. There is something in this world that is unstoppable. It is the justice of God. Tell it to all the terrorists, bullies, and tyrants that would plunge humanity into a new barbarism. God's justice will prevail. Live your life and conduct your business with this guiding principle: God's justice will prevail. And when you think of letting go – and giving in – and throwing up your hands in disgust – discipline your thoughts with this sure warning: God's justice will prevail.

When I was a high school student in Brooklyn, New York, I had the opportunity to meet Marty Glickman. For those of you who may not know the name, Marty Glickman was the radio announcer for the New York Giants football team before NFL games were widely televised. On Saturday mornings, Marty Glickman would

also broadcast New York City high school football games, and as a result students got to know and love him.

In 1994 Marty Glickman attended an exhibition football game between the San Francisco Forty-Niners and the then San Diego Chargers at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin, Germany. Marty Glickman's seat for the game was in the same box that was built for Adolph Hitler to view the 1936 Olympics. Glickman, before he became a broadcaster, was at one time a world-class sprinter and was even on the 1936 American Olympic 400-meter relay team. However, he was not allowed to participate in the games because of Hitler's hatred of Jews. Marty Glickman was a Jew and therefore he was barred from competition. But now Hitler was dead – the victim of the evil, insane policies that he pursued. Now Hitler's former viewing stand was Marty Glickman's viewing stand.

Hitler has gone the way that all tyrants will eventually go. Osama bin Laden. Saddam Hussein. Gaddafi of Libya. And yes, someday Putin, the Ayatollahs, the Chinese Communist Party and North Korean leadership, and the leaders of Hamas and other terrorist organizations. Why? Because God's justice will prevail. One day all of God's people will live in freedom and justice under God's reign. This is the promise of the Bible.

“Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry to him day and night?” Jesus knew the answer. It may not happen as quickly as we might prefer but it will happen. God's justice will prevail.

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October 19, 2025
Text – Luke 18:1-8a
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