

Rom.6:3-11 and Matt. 5:20-26

Jesus said, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

When you hear the word ‘righteousness’, do you think of... a noun?, as some state arrived at, some achievement? Something unreachable, belonging securely only to the beatified?

What if I were to suggest to you that we begin to think of “Righteousness”, of which Jesus speaks in this morning’s gospel, as a **verb**? As the ceaseless activity of God.. His way **alone** of making right what has been wrong, His way of making whole again what has been broken. To put things right is to **rectify**... Consider then for the next little while, Righteousness as an ongoing act of God in each and every moment of our lives.

His righteousness consists of two things: love as mercy ..giving us what we don’t deserve, and His righteousness is love as justice in the divine sense, setting right as He sees it what is wrong in His creation and.. His creatures. Even more surprisingly, the invisible God does this right-making in spite of our resistances..our ignorance, stubbornness, our resentments, our procrastinations. I hazard a guess Karma is but a shadowy accomplice?!

God in His mercy wills to forgive us; God in his justice wills to put right..to rectify what’s wrong within us and without.. in His world. They are together God’s righteous love. God pours both out in the paschal mystery and the host and chalice.

As an example of righteousness, of showing mercy and of the need to rectify, there's a story about a little Albanian boy told by an old newspaper editor:

“There was a naughty son whose carpenter father would hammer a nail into a precious piece of wood his father had saved all his life every time his son did something wrong. One day, his son asked, “Why are you doing this?”, and when it was explained, the boy went off by himself for a while and then returned. He declared his will: he willed to behave as his Dad wanted.. for his father's sake, especially. Some time passed. Now, each time he did something good in his father's eyes, his dad would remove a nail from the wood. Eventually, all the nails came out.”

The storyteller lets a few seconds pass, allowing suspense to precede the story's moral..”Yes, the nails were gone, but the holes always remained.” Mercy and forgiveness equate with the removal of the nails, but the original integrity of the precious piece of wood is now broken, disfigured by all the holes. It is less than its created self...For things to be right in God's creation, those holes have to be filled and the wood brought to newness of life. Righteousness He completes by filling the holes or flaws, too..remaking what was perfectly created but marred by human fault.

The nails another puts in us and those we put into others can be removed in the mercy of forgiveness; but, we are humanly incapable of filling the holes left behind. By Nature, we are at a loss to deal with the flaws delivered to our genetic makeup by the Fall..that predispose us to say, sins of dishonesty, violence, or slothfulness. By nurture, we are at a loss to erase the flaws which neglect, deceit, greed, and selfishness deliver into our beings from parents, friends, teachers...our enlightened professors, distant spouses

and haughty priests. Abject passivity can lead to the sin of sloth, or a proclivity to anger equating with murder can come from abuse; seeking love at any price from neglect; a habit of distrust from being deceived throughout life, are examples of flaws others leave in us..the holes they leave.

Now we've heard this: "But I say, Whoever is even angry with his brother commits murder." Our Lord says, that unless our righteousness succeeds in being rid of anger altogether, coming to our eternal home with God is in jeopardy... O Lord, who can not be angry sometimes at ourselves, our neighbors, our world of neighbors? How can we possibly come to such righteousness? Jesus' point is that even anger can mar the souls of our neighbor and ourselves and thereby endanger our own soul's fate.

But remember we are considering a verb: righteousness is not a state we achieve. It is an act God does alone and in His own time.. Righteousness' rectifying aspect is God's work of love in us at this very moment: chipping away at the proclivities to anger and violence that nature and nurture may have dealt us as our flaws and instead.. moving us to acts of mercy, kindness, or charity and most especially, moving us to praise Him for giving us the willingness to be put right.

How are we made righteous, then? In the gospel lesson, Jesus is standing right here with His disciples speaking as God speaks ..as when our Father says, "But **I** say," . When Jesus emerged from the Jordan River at His baptism, did He not say, "**I have come to fulfill all righteousness.**"? The disciples' desire for being right with God is to be found in Him.

As human beings, we cannot come anywhere close to Jesus' commandment not to be angry at our brother anytime. But we can stick with the willingness to have it gone. To long to be made more and more into His

image, from the flaws that move us to sin, in short, **to be willing** for him to fill us as He sees fit, or to remake the space that separates two human beings, whether it's a wasteland of longstanding enmity or a marriage full of broken parts, are beginnings for righteousness to take hold. It is to be present to Jesus when He emerges from the Jordan and cry out, "Lord, Fulfill mine!"

Jesus fulfills all righteousness, so He, within us, moves us to forgive..by removing the nails with which we crucify or have been crucified by each other. He then rectifies the flaws in our character and in our neighbor's character, or wood by filling them with Grace..... He wants to rid us all of the flaws that cause Our Creator to be displeased, for loving fathers are wont to be pleased with their children.. It is to be in such a place so as to anticipate God's righteous work inside us, and to be prepared for and accept the occasional painful and humiliating "Right-making". .. Folks, when that happens that means the Kingdom of Heaven is **that moment**... we taste a morsel of eternity, for being made right with God so as to behold Him is our hearts' desire.

So, anger between the neighbors is the surface and visible sin that Jesus equates with murder in the gospel. The flaw of egotism, the tendency toward self-righteousness likely lurk below awaiting rectification. When we are ready and willing, we hope also to be rectified in the mold He always intended for us, to be put back together as He sees fit. But be patient. Rectification takes a lifetime and is completed only when we are made able to see our Father's face.

Like the little Albanian fellow's situation, we humans cannot "rectify," even though are able to be forgiven or to forgive another. God alone is our Righteousness.. So, if we feel some sharp chipping away at and nagging

filling up going on inside at our flaws, God is there at work making us righteous in His sight. It is therefore an occasion for joy.

When I or Father Craig bid you God's peace near the end of Mass, that Peace is the peace of being made whole again..of being forgiven and on the way to being set aright for good.. At Mass, we become alive unto God.. and are righteous in God's sight only because we have taken Jesus in..If So, then, dark anger won't last more than an instant, and murder as its equal won't bar your way to heaven.

{Recall the dashes and glints of light to be seen on the shape of that temple from the river just after dawn? If you pursue your curiosity, a guide will take you to the temple's base so you can look up and up and see that even from the base this place of worship was built with ceramics. Look even closer and see that the light reflects off couplets of broken plates and cups..all exquisitely painted. The guide will say these come from broken homes in times of war and want, broken marriages when used they were used as weapons, human spirits broken by sharp pieces of anger. That, WHOLE, they must have been lovely on a dinner table at one time, is one thing, but now these one whole things of beauty are shattered into shards and fragments set in place on a temple .. That they are all arranged as human hands with fingers spread and looking to join their opposite broken partner is quite another beauty. One cannot see what connects these broken parts across the spaces, but the layered effect of ring upon rising ring of broken human things joined together as they are meant to be (teacups as well as relationships) , sends out those shining flashes. Think of it, many broken human treasures and once treasured bonds of love brought back to life and made whole, into something growing up to reflect light back to the heavens, Think of the many broken lives and relations that could be brought back to the feet of Him who is our Righteousness just by being willing to have Him fix inside of us what we can't. Once invited , He will do His righteousness..then Dark Anger won't last an instant, and murder as its equal won't bar your way to Heaven.}

Alive unto God.