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Life Isn't Fair: What to Do About It?

“Life isn't fair...” is another of those adages that carries truth.

I think about that wisdom sometimes when I am praying the Catholic prayer, Stations of the Cross. This walking prayer includes a 5th Station where Simon of Cyrene is forced to help Jesus carry his cross.

I have long been impressed with Simon. Catholic tradition says he is among our formally declared saints. If he had a day-timer I doubt that helping a teacher who had become a convicted and condemned criminal was on his list of to-do's for that Friday. The amazing thing though—for all the trouble brought to him—he apparently didn't get bitter or vengeful and instead was won over by the deep goodness of Jesus. That “life isn't fair” moment for him was a saving one. A lesson seems to be: bring good out of difficulty.

There is also the call when life isn't fair to try to redress injustice, to bring truth and goodness into situations. This often enough takes time, and what to do and especially how to live and think in the meantime gets to be a challenge. Vengeance is not helpful.

When it is a case that life isn't fair for others, a new set of calls develop. We are somehow to be our sisters' and brothers' keepers and thus to do what we can to help make things better for others. Paying attention to what is happening around us, evaluating how to help and then doing that is the plan.

Then there is the matter of my memberships in groups that need to be fair to other persons. I live and/or serve in institutions. I have a responsibility to pay attention to our institution's policies and actions, helping make sure both are just – in right relationship – or all individuals involved.

There is also the matter of my memberships in

groups being just to other groups of people. I recently read an analysis of the food riots in Haiti and 32 (of 192 United Nations member states) other poor countries. This analysis indicated that the subsidy on US rice had harmed rice production in countries economically poor. This with the other factors (growing demand, higher fossil fuel prices, more land use for ethanol production) was a major factor in growing hunger among desperate people in countries economically poor. I learned that our protecting our farmers had significantly harmed farmers in other countries. This needs to be fixed. The more so when our country demands through the International Monetary Fund that countries in debt remove tariffs protecting their products while the US keeps our tariffs. This reminds me of another adage: “Heads, I win; tails, you lose.”

Life in these instances is not fair and cries out for our making it more fair. God is on the side of people who are poor and vulnerable; we are fundamentally called to become more like God. God is counting on us for these tasks and has given us so many gifts enabling us to pull it all off.

Thus it seems that “Life isn't fair” is not an excuse for inaction let alone loss of hope. There is another adage to the effect: when life gets tough, the tough get going. Let's use our God-given toughness to make life better for myself and everyone else!

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