

“Justice” is probably a concept, an attribute we would unreservedly associate with God. And, if we are to build his Kingdom here on earth – that means in our own lives and in our societies and countries – then we surely understand that we must live and run our societies with justice.

This Sunday’s readings describe God’s sense and practice of justice. Unfortunately, they bear little resemblance to many of our lives and certainly how we run our society and world, or allow it to be run in our name!

As Donald Trump would say (no I am not going to mimic him!), “Justice is a big word.” It is a difficult and challenging concept, particularly when God calls us to always act in justice. The criminal justice system is a whole topic for itself. The United States has 5% of the world’s population, yet it has 25% of those incarcerated in prison in the whole world. Criminal justice is so often more about vengeance than justice, yet it gets our full and enthusiastic support: “Lock them up” is the self-righteous cry.

To concentrate for now on our exercise of justice closer to home, this Sunday’s readings encourage us to exercise justice as God would in our personal dealings with people,; to imitate God and to think and feel as God does, with God’s heart.

Don’t let’s pretend that this is easy. The reason for that is that we have been brought up and educated, by our society more often than not, to confuse vengeance with justice.

We are often emotional in this area and fall into just what the Book of Ecclesiasticus warns about in the first reading this Sunday: “Resentment and anger, these are foul things.”

In the Gospel passage Jesus tells a story that illustrates the compassion we hope to receive from God and with which we should therefore treat other people. If we are not grateful to God for his tolerance and patience and mercy with us, then we, like the ungrateful servant in Jesus’ parable, will go on taking out our anger and resentment on others. If God’s forgiveness of sins is only one of the many things we recite in the Creed on Sunday and not a personal experience of his love, then we will struggle to forgive other people.

With God justice in fact develops into compassion and love; he is “slow to anger and rich in mercy,” says this Sunday’s Psalm - unlike us sometimes! For us to act in this way is against a lot of what we have been told is practical, what makes sense, what is effective to keep order in society; it is against the world’s so-called wisdom. But as Christians it is what we are called to do.

It is the example Jesus himself set in his life and in his self-sacrifice. Can we say, well that was all very well for Jesus, but that’s not for me? Not if we are genuine in following him and calling ourselves Christian. But I am not saying any of this is easy.

Peter thought he had got the hang of what Jesus was teaching and he suggested the idea of generously forgiving someone seven times. But Jesus goes beyond what is reasonable and wants to carry us with him into his world, the Kingdom of God, and calls on us to forgive “seventy-seven times”, meaning as often as you need to.

Jesus calls us to reach beyond the reasonable and the rational and to forgive “from your heart.” It is not meant to make sense, but it is to live with the heart of Christ no less. That is the grace we received at our Baptism; let us not ignore it and waste that grace. We are told by the Priest at our Baptism: “You have put on Christ.” We are no longer ordinary mortals, battling with these “foul things, resentment and anger.” (Ecclesiasticus 27:30) We have come to new life in Christ and can do better. Do we believe this? Do we believe in ourselves as Christians?

The call to act with God’s compassionate justice is our noble calling. Let us be noble in our response, as in small steps in the right direction we begin to judge and act in communion with Jesus Christ and with the heart of Almighty God. We sign up to this every time we sincerely pray the Our Father: “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”

And surely we reaffirm this commitment, when we enter into communion with Jesus in the Eucharist? We receive enormous grace from God; let us be gracious with others and as we participate in our society for the good of all – the deserving but also the undeserving.