

25TH Sunday A 9-20-08 5:00 pm only

In a former life, I served some years as a hospital chaplain, and one of the patient areas I visited was the oncology wing. And back then, Dr. Richard Meyer was the primary oncologist. All day long, month after month, year after year, he would visit cancer patients. And when he would arrive at the hospital, I remember saying, "Good morning, Dr. Meyer! How are you?" And he--the oncologist--would always answer, "Better than I deserve!" Better than I deserve!

Friends, if you need to leave right away, here is a two-sentence homily: we are all five o'clock workers; God treats all of us better than we deserve--so we ought to be grateful, not envious.

A parishioner has no electric, no hot water all week long. He is understandably frustrated. Then it occurs to him: millions of people in the world never have electric, never have a hot shower. The power will never come back on for them. He realizes: it could have just as easily been me living there. What exactly did I do to be born in this particular country?

Another parish member says: a complete stranger loaned me a \$700.00 generator. The fellow didn't know me at all, had no special reason to give it to me. *I wouldn't have done that for someone else.*

JUSTICE is when people get what they deserve: you work for a day, you get a day's pay. MERCY is being treated more generously than we deserve: you work two hours, but you get a full day's pay.

We humans tend to want justice--at least for others. We call it being "fair." Jesus seems to prefer mercy: the woman caught in adultery.....the Good Thief on the Cross. At Mass, we never pray, "Lord have justice." We cry out "Lord, have mercy"--because none of us stands innocent before God. None of us claims that we have been perfect disciples since the first hour. So we pray: Lord, treat us better than we deserve! And help us to treat others the same way!

Do you remember the story of St. Augustine? That he was a juvenile delinquent? How as a youth he stole fruit from a tree--just because he felt like doing it? Augustine, who fathered an illegitimate child when he was 18? When Augustine was about 34, he converted to Christianity, finally becoming a great bishop, a great teacher. Many years later, Augustine wrote, "Late have I loved thee, O beauty ever ancient, ever new! Late have I loved thee!" Not TOO late, just "late." Because it's never too late.

Friends, it doesn't matter if it's 5:00 pm, or 5:30, or one minute till 6:00. It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done. It is never too late to begin again. Never too late to "seek the Lord while he may be found, to call on him while he is near"--as we heard in Isaiah. Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future.

And if anyone feels they have never failed, that they have been a faithful worker for the Lord throughout their life--then they can pray for a heart as generous and merciful as the Lord's.