

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.

July 20, 2014

Balancing Justice and Mercy

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC_BY-NC-ND International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/fatherlawrence_frizzellphil/224/

Balancing Justice and Mercy

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for July 20, 2014 for Cycle A:

Wis 12:13, 16-19; Ps 86; Rom 8:26-27; Mt 13:24-43

BALANCING JUSTICE AND MERCY

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The understanding that each religious community and its members has of God will determine the way that teachings of the moral order are set forth. Moreover, in many cases sincere parents will project this model in their relationship with the younger generation. The religious culture which stresses "law and order" to the detriment of people in their needs and weaknesses often develops from an overemphasis on the righteousness and justice of God. How many families experience a military-like rigidity in relationships? On the other hand, an understanding of the wonderful dimensions of divine love, manifesting itself in mercy and forgiveness, may lead certain people to the sin of presumption. Parents may be so "soft" that their children fail to learn responsibility and self-discipline. Finding a balanced understanding of the challenge to live in imitation of God is of great importance!

The Wisdom of Solomon, written for Jews in Alexandria, Egypt late in the first century B.C., teaches the ancient insights of the Hebrew Bible in sophisticated terms that would appeal to those in the community who were exposed to Greek philosophy. Belief in immortality of the soul, a great insight in Greek thought, must be accompanied by a life of integrity (righteousness), with justice as the foundation for one's attitude toward neighbor (1:1-5). The Jewish insight into God's righteousness provides the basis for a way of living that prepares for eternal rewards.

The right order which God has instilled into creation cannot be mocked with impunity. Any legislator needs to set up a judicial system to enforce the laws of the society. However, the divine Judge can read hearts and can forgive the transgression of those who repent and who desire to improve. The power by which God created the universe was guided by divine wisdom; so too, the justice whereby God judges is tempered by clemency and patience, aspects of the attribute of love. This is enunciated beautifully in our passage. "By acting thus, you have taught your people, that those who are just must be kind" (12:19).

Addressing an audience in rural Galilee, Jesus drew a lesson from the plight of a farmer who finds weeds throughout his grain field. Overzealous and premature weeding may cause loss of many good plants. So Jesus explains that divine judgment, while inevitable, will never be the occasion for loss of the innocent. This is the second parable for which St. Matthew records an explanation (13:36-43). As in the parable of the sower (13:18-23), there is a struggle between good and evil as the seed matures. Punishment is rejection from God's kingdom for "all who cause others to sin and all evildoers" (13:41). Again the Gospel stresses that we are all teachers, by word and example (see Mt 5:19). We must remember that every good life has an illuminating quality and "in the kingdom of their Father the righteous will shine like the sun" (13:43).

The effort to achieve a balanced approach to the biblical call for holiness requires constant prayer and reflection. The mystery of God's inner life is to be imitated through our response to the human vocation of being created in the divine image. This includes bringing right order into all that we do, while manifesting the forgiveness and mercy towards others that we hope to find in the moment of God's judgment regarding our lives.