

Tips

Something in my past badgers me always to leave more than the standard twenty percent tip at restaurants – indeed on occasion way more! It certainly makes me a welcome customer at my usual hangouts – but it has more to do with my remembrance that it was my mother’s tips as a waitress at a downtown restaurant in Philadelphia’s civic and financial district that got us through the big 1930’s Depression. (My father, though a young skilled sheet metal worker, had to take jobs like driving a laundry truck. All development had stopped, leaving wide ditches plowed through open fields in what *would have been* new streets lined with new houses – for years after the 1929 Crash.)

My mother was a favorite of visiting conventioners, lawyers, city officials, theatrical celebrities . . . But don’t think in dollars. Back then fifty cents was a big tip; all of my mother’s evening intake was contained in a purse full of quarters, dimes and nickels – with a purchasing power – given the low price of things - of what might seem astronomical nowadays. I mean a lead soldier from Woolworth’s Five and Dime could be bought for a nickel. A movie cost only a dime.

Which brings up the subject of divine Grace. We hear a lot about justice during these critical times. But what is justice? The traditional symbol of justice is a tall woman wearing a blindfold (signifying objectivity) holding a pair of scales – upon which a balance is achieved *adjusting conflicting claims or merited rewards or penalties*. (Thank God for dictionaries!)

She symbolizes the Law as codified by societies. Of course, down through history a lot of people have complained that the laws as they stand can perpetuate injustices – e.g. slavery or redlining . . . complaints we hear about everyday in the news.

Well, what has that to do with the subject of divine Grace? Precisely this: in the New Testament (e.g. in St. Paul) true Justice *is* Grace! It is gratuitous graciousness – as where Paul says that, while transgressions lead to so much pain, “how much more” does the grace of God overflow upon us all. God as revealed in the teaching and behavior of Christ is characterized by “how much more” – a love, an appreciation of all things created and as *excessively* appreciative of human existence – to the point of mercy, but not even of mercy but of your actual worth and worthiness as you *are*, regardless of how much you (or others) may belittle yourself.

And that’s how we must think of God as just – as Grace – as always “*doing us justice*” – a justice *based* not even on our behavior but *upon what an astonishing being each of us is* . . . (even as you look upon your newborn child as such). And until that day when we “do each other justice” in that gratuitous, gracious, radical, pre-judicial way, our (often biased) ways of quid pro quo justice will tense us up for years to come.

Unless you can’t wait that long – and then you can begin to change by bestowing *at least* a twenty percent tip on somebody’s waitressing mother – so that her son may also benefit from your generosity and buy another lead soldier.

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