By John Bostwick, O.Praem.

For God, Justice = Mercy

One of Pope Francis’ most well-known comments is “Who am I to judge?” While there was originally a particular context for this statement, it has significance beyond the original question. It suggests an attitude, a stance towards persons that is typical of Pope Francis’ ministry. For our purpose it also is consistent with the message of the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat. Rather than going in to root out the weeds, the workers are told to hold back and all will be sorted out in the end. It is not our place to judge. That responsibility is reserved to God alone.

The first lesson affirms God’s power but explains that God’s might is displayed in God’s clemency. God’s might is identified with God’s mercy. The counsel given is that those who are just must be kind. And all of this is a reason for confidence and hope for the sinner.

We are told in Genesis that humans are created in the image and after the likeness of God. that includes exercising justice and authority as God would: with mercy and forbearance. Athanasius of Alexandria taught in his On the Incarnation that in Christ, God became human so that humans might become as God.

Can we imagine how different our world could be if people lived what the scripture teaches, if we saw justice in terms of mercy and compassion rather than punishment or getting even. Our current social, political, family – and even Church life is marked by division, antagonism and adversarial relationships rooted often in unreasonable fear and the need to blame.

God is mercy; we who are made in God’s image are called to live mercy.

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