

As a priest at a parish with a parochial school, the best opportunities to interact with the students were at lunch or during recess. One of the things I noticed at recess, was that the rules of games changed as the games progressed. Sometimes through the consent of the players; other times through the imposition of a child who assumed the role of leader. The almost continuous modification of the rules seemed to be a feature of playground games; yet when a player felt at a disadvantage, one could hear them call out “that’s not fair.”

In today’s reading from Ezekiel, we hear that cry from the house of Israel. God’s mercy is too merciful; God’s justice is too just.

Our own perceptions of justice and mercy are often tainted with ulterior motives ... and when justice catches up with us ... or when mercy seems to take away an advantage, we may feel that it is unfair in one way or another.

Yet in the Gospel, Our Lord raises the bar on the accepted moral code, and in a sense calls for external observances to be reflected in internal disposition.

Quite often in relation to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the resistant individual’s examination of conscience stops at: “Well, I didn’t kill anyone.”

But what Jesus is saying in the Gospel is that even just *thinking* about such things is as bad as doing them.

Which should give us pause.

Our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving should open us to considering the need for our own personal repentance - and perhaps even seek out an opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In that way, Lent becomes an opportunity to take out our spiritual garbage, and clean up our spiritual house.

Let us pray to be open to Christ’s call in the Gospels for radical repentance and self-transformation ... and may we receive the graces necessary to accept that call.