

## Grace vs. Justice

We, as individuals, live life the best we can even though we all fall short of perfection. Each event that occurs in a person's life must be looked at and analyzed from all angles in order to make a decision that is the right thing to do and that the decision will bring about a positive end result. We always strive to make sure that we allow dignity and respect of someone if they acknowledge they were wrong. We are keepers of your children many hours each day and strive to give grace when grace is due. Grace means to allow forgiveness of punishment even though that punishment should have been the outcome.

There was a man by the name of Fiorello LaGuardia who was the mayor of New York City. One night he showed up at a night court in one of the poorest wards of the city; and that's where this phase of our story begins. He dismissed the presiding judge for the evening and sent him home to his family. Then the mayor himself took over the bench. As it happened on that bitterly cold night, a tattered old woman stood before the bench, accused of stealing a loaf of bread. You must understand these were desperate times. A lot of people were going hungry.

With quivering lips and tear filled eyes, she admitted to the theft. But, she added, my daughter's husband has deserted her, she is sick, and her children are crying because they have nothing to eat.

The shopkeeper, however, refused to drop the charges. It's a bad neighborhood your honor, she's guilty, he shouted. The law must be upheld, she's got to be punished to teach other people a lesson. LaGuardia knew that her accuser was right. The very office that he swore to uphold required that he enforce the letter of the law.

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the old woman and said, I've got to punish you; the law makes no exceptions. He then pronounced the sentence. The old woman shuddered when she heard the words, ten dollars or ten days in jail. But already the judge was reaching into his pocket. He pulled out a ten-dollar bill and threw it into this hat. Here's the ten-dollar fine, which I now remit. Furthermore, I'm fining everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.

Sitting in that courtroom that night were seventy petty criminals, a few New York policemen, and her accuser, a fuming, red-faced, storekeeper. The bewildered old grandmother left the courtroom with \$47.50. This was enough to buy groceries for several months.

This next story is about Jean, a convict freshly out of prison after serving nineteen years hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread. The original sentence was five years; unsuccessful escape attempts and the resulting additional time pushed it to a grand total of nineteen years. He believed that his sentence was grossly out of proportion to his crime, and by the time of his release he had built up a tremendous bitterness toward society. This bitterness was only intensified by the rejection and scorn which he experienced in attempting to find work and lodging immediately after his release; he was determined to have his revenge against society and against God in some form or fashion. But an unthinkable act of mercy and generosity by a saintly small-town bishop drastically alters the trajectory of Jean's life.

Jean was in need of shelter and food. Late one night he knocked on the door of the bishop's home asking for food. The bishop, seeing the disparity of Jean, opened the door to his home and invited Jean in. The bishop and his wife gave him a bath, feed him and provided him a bed. During the night Jean, with anger in his heart, stole silver from the bishop's house and ran into the darkness outside. The next morning the police returned to the bishop's house with Jean. They lay his silver on the ground for the bishop to claim the stolen property. The bishop went into the house and grabbed additional silver and gave it to Jean. The bishop, explained, that he was very upset with Jean because he didn't take the entire gift of silver. Bewildered the police released Jean.

From that act of grace, Jean determines to live as an honest man.

As educators and administrators we constantly strive to do what is right for each individual student. Sometimes showing mercy or grace isn't congruent to societal norms, but we do it because we hope to make a difference. We try to fix our thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. As a micro-spectacle of this human race it's easy to lose focus of how we need to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.