

One Book One District: Lasallian Reading Guide

Just Mercy

by Brian Stevenson

Faith in the Presence of God

- After reading *Just Mercy*, where in Bryan Stevenson's story or in the stories of the many clients he served did you see faith in the presence of God exemplified?
- Stevenson titled Chapter 15, "Broken" and talks about the power of experiencing mercy. How can showing Christ-like love and mercy to those around us help in understand each other better and acknowledge our own humanity?
- Bryan Stevenson reflects, "When I hung up the phone that night I had a wet face and a broken heart. The lack of compassion I witnessed every day had finally exhausted me...For the first time I realized that my life was just full of brokenness" (p. 288). He then adds, "After working for more than twenty-five years, I understood that I don't do what I do because it's required or necessary or important. I don't do it because I have no choice. I do what I do because I'm broken too" (pp. 288-289). *How do you experience a sense of vocation in the author and what do you think keeps him going in his commitment?*

Respect for All Persons

- What are two examples from the novel where you saw respect for the dignity of each person being honored? What are two examples where you saw respect and the dignity of each person not being honored?
- Stevenson had a horrific and embarrassing encounter with the Atlanta police while he was hanging out outside listening to music. Do you believe he handled the incident in a manner that demanded respect for his human rights? Do you believe he should have done more? Why or why not?
- Re-read the letter Ian wrote to Mr. Stevenson (page 162) and consider Pope Francis' words, "every encounter is fruitful. Each encounter returns people and things to their place" (Pope Francis, September 2016). *How does the letter and the words from Pope Francis speak to more deeply consider God's presence and respect for all persons.*

Concern for the Poor and Social Justice

- Do you feel that the criminal justice system as it is now shows concern for the poor and strives for justice? Why or why not?

- How does the incarceration rate of the United States compare to those of poor countries? How are “minor” and “adult” defined in these countries?
- The author writes, “Abstractions about capital punishment were one thing, but the details of systematically killing someone who is not a threat are completely different” (p. 90). He then adds, “Yet we were comfortable killing people who kill, in part because we think we can do it in a manner that doesn’t implicate our humanity... (pp. 90-91). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “...authority will limit itself to such [non-lethal] means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person”(CCC, 2267). *What implications does all of this have for our “concern for the poor and social justice”?*

Quality Education

- What role do you think quality education or a lack of access to quality education plays in the current realities of the criminal justice system in the United States?
- How has your lasallian education prepared you to face difficult topics like incarceration and injustices in the criminal justice system?
- Stevenson writes, “We get angry when people fail to recognize the need for thoughtful and compassionate assistance when it comes to the physically disabled, but because mental disabilities aren’t visible in the same way, we tend to be dismissive of the needs of the disabled and quick to judge their deficits and failures” (p. 199). What role can Lasallian Catholic education play in addressing this issue?

Inclusive Community

- “I continue to meet stone catchers along the way who inspire me and make me believe that we can do better than we’ve done for the accused, convicted, and condemned among us—as well as those who are victimized by crime and violence—and that all of us can do better for one another. The work continues.” (*Just Mercy* p. 316)

Aside from Brian Stevenson himself, who were some examples of “stone catchers” that you saw in the book? After reading this book, what are some ways you can commit to being a “stone catcher” and creating an inclusive community (at school, at home, and in your local town/ city)?

- Lasallians are called to walk to the peripheries and stand with those who suffer injustices, like Walter McMillian and the incarcerated children in the book. Name and describe some organizations in your community that address injustices in the criminal justice system.

Are any of these places near your home or school community?

- “The collateral consequence of incarcerating women are significant. Approximately 75 to 80 percent of incarcerated women are mothers with minor children. Nearly 65 percent had minor children living with them at the time of their arrest...” (pp. 236-237). In light of John Baptist de La Salle words, “God wills not only that all come to the knowledge of truth but also that all be saved” (MTR 193.3), *how does the Lasallian Catholic mission call us to respond to this reality?*