

# THE VIRTUE OF JUSTICE

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

The virtue that we want to pray about today is the virtue of justice. It is- last week we prayed about the virtue of prudence and we said it was the most important virtue of the cardinal virtues. And now we want to see how we are living the virtue of justice which has to do, as the classical definition goes, with giving each person his or her due. The author, Luis de Granada, in his book called *The Sinner's Guide*, he has a great description of the threefold obligation of the virtue of justice. He says, "It belongs to justice to render to everyone his due: to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves. If we faithfully acquit ourselves of these duties to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves, we fulfill the obligations of justice and thus become truly virtuous. To accomplish this great work, let your heart be that of a son towards God, that of a brother towards your neighbor, and that of a judge towards yourself. In this, the prophet tells us, the virtue of man consists. I will show the old man what is good and what the Lord requires thee, verily to do judgment and to love mercy and to walk solicitous with thy God- that's from Micah- The duty of judgment is what man owes to himself, the duty of mercy is what he owes to his neighbor, and to walk humbly before God is the duty he owes to his creator."

So, this is really a great way of thinking of justice in a three-fold manner because justice has to do with the right relationships that we have with God, with others, and with ourselves. And the right way of thinking about our relationship with God, which is also called the virtue of religion, is part of the virtue of justice, is to think of ourselves- and not just think of ourselves such we are children of God, as Saint John says in his letter, and therefore we should behave like children before our Father, and all the consequences that that- that that entails. With our neighbor or with others, we should be very merciful because they are also children of God and they deserve understanding and mercy, you know, because we too are- walk in their shoes and we too make mistakes, and we don't have all of the answers. And- and we need each other, we don't have everything we need, we need other people. And also, they don't have everything that they need- they need us and this is by design, this is how God designed it. He wanted us to help each other and to lead each other to- back to God, back to him.

And then, according to Luis de Granada, the duty we have towards ourselves is the duty of judgment, meaning that we should examine ourselves, you know, and see how we can improve and do better ourselves, you know, because we always tend to be lenient on ourselves and hard on other people. But really, what we should never lose is the ability to- to hold ourselves accountable, you know, that's a healthy attitude to have. Otherwise we- we so easily give in to comfort and- and- and then we end up not fulfilling our responsibilities and maybe even kind of justifying ourselves interiorly, you know, justifying our behavior which may not be the- the greatest. But, it doesn't mean- I mean, when I mean that we should judge ourselves or examine ourselves, I don't mean that we should judge ourselves too harshly either. We should judge ourselves according to the truth. And St. Paul tells us, you know, that he doesn't even judge himself, he let's God judge him. But, you know, that, as far as he's concerned, he's not egregiously violating any of the commandments and therefore his conscience doesn't impute him any- any sin. Okay, fine. But he- the first judgment, the God because only God really knows us.

But this idea that injustice is really the virtue that we have to have with- that regulates the relationships we have with other people is- is complemented with the Biblical notion of justice because it's a little different than this classical notion. It is, in the Old Testament, if we- if we look at the word for justice, it really refers to holiness. It's like the- the person who is a just man or woman is the one who is his holy, you know, is always dedicated to the Lord and walks straight, you know, along the path that leads to God. And it's not just about, you know, a person who pays the taxes or- or does particular and specific acts of the virtue of justice, but it's really about the whole of one's life, you know, and that's why St. Joseph, actually, in the New Testament, is known as a just man. The Biblical notion is applied there, that he's the one who walks in the way of the Lord. He's the one who prays. He's a just man in all things, you know, he's a holy man, he's a prudent man, and- and he fulfills the law of God.

Now, this notion here of justice, you know, the person who is holy, so often in the Old Testament, and also we could see in the- in the gospels, was distorted by the the Pharisees who wanted to appear to be holy, to appear to be just, and yet they were- they were not. We could see it in the older brother of the prodigal son, that older brother, he wanted to externally fulfill every demand of the law, of the rules of his father in his farm, but he really was not through and through a person who was just because he interiorly had the wrong attitude. He really was a man of anger and of hatred and jealousy, and, you know, there were so many contradictions in him that- that are obvious. Same thing with the Pharisees. They just want the externals but not the- but not what's really internal which is this- this outlook and attitude of always wanting to fulfill the law of God or- or do the will of God, you know. This is, I think, the- the broader concept of justice that we see in the Bible.

And it's also related to another concept that we get from St. Paul where he talks about being justified. So for him, justice is a state in which we find ourselves in thanks to the faith that we are given by God, by the grace we are given by God. So, he has a notion of justice as a gift that comes from God, and it's not something that is acquired by our efforts alone. And it's- and he's very emphatic about that because the- the Jews of the time, some Jews of the time, like the ones we're talking about, like the older brother of the prodigal son, who's kind of like a paradigm of this kind of person, they think, they believe that by fulfilling the externals of the law, which St. Paul calls the works of the law, that they are going to be made justified before God in the eyes of God and- and that's not exactly true. Certainly, we have to fulfill the will of God and we cannot go against the law of God, but it's not by our efforts alone that we become holy. It's God's gift to us that- that really justifies us, or- or puts us in a state of grace or in a state of righteousness before God, right. Because we have sinned, all of us have sinned, and we- we are in a humongous hole that we dug for ourselves and we cannot get out by ourselves. And so, no matter how much work- how many works we do, how much work we do in order to try to get out of this hole that is very big, much bigger than we are, we- we cannot do it, we need help from above. And then certainly, yes, when we get the rope from above, which is grace, and faith, and all that, yes, we have to climb up that- that- that rope which takes work, perhaps, you know, but it's, you know, the only reason why we're able to climb out is because somebody had mercy on us from above. And that's what- that's the notion of justice that St. Paul is talking about, and he's warning us against thinking that we gave ourselves the rope, we made the rope by which we got out, and we can't do that. We cannot pull ourselves up by our bootstraps as the saying goes, it's just, we cannot create ourselves, we cannot save ourselves. We need God to save us. But yes, once we- we receive those graces, then we certainly are able to then climb up out of the hole with yes, with- by cooperating with that humongous grace which has been given to us, which means that, certainly, if we have been forgiven that we should also, you know, be just towards one another.

And we see that, for instance, with Zacchaeus, you know, Zacchaeus has been forgiven when he climbs up the sycamore tree and Our Lord says, you know, I will- I should stay in your house tonight, I should have dinner with you. And Zacchaeus is so happy that- that Our Lord basically has forgiven him, that he says, well, now that he he knows that he's in friendship with Christ, that he says, if I have defrauded anyone, I will pay them back forth- fourfold. That work that he's doing in paying people back fourfold is not his work alone, it's really aided by grace and he's corresponding to grace.

Now, at the same time, this notion of being justified before God in St. Paul has been taken to an extreme by, as we know, historically, by Luther. Luther read St. Paul and he really- he realized that there were too many things that were being done in order to be saved, like- or being offered by the Church, to- for the people to be saved, like the selling of the indulgences and things like that, and he

was kind of scandalized by- by all that and he made that akin to the works of the law. And so, you know, if you pay, if you're rich, basically you can buy an indulgence and get out of purgatory. And he thought that was unfair. Obviously, it's unfair. It's-that's not what it should be. There was corruption in the Church and certainly he- he saw that. But he went the other extreme in- in saying you're just saved by grace alone and that's it, and you don't need to do anything at all. So, you don't need- any pious act that you do is just worthless or something like that. And that's not true either, you know, we have to correspond as well. But not- I would say in- in a way that gives us credit.

Some people think it's well, yeah, God does 99% of it and we do 1%. No, I don't like to think of it that way. I like to think of it- I don't like to think of it in this other way, either, which is God does 50%, you do 50%. No, 50/50, no. I like to think about it in God does 100 and we do 100 but at different levels, in- in different ways. And so from our point of view, yes, we are doing a lot, you know, in- in corresponding to grace, but that's at a human level which is not sufficient if God did not do 100% of- of the saving, you know, the- or the redeeming that- that at his level. Of course, these are analogies, they all have their limits, but we can- these are ways of thinking of justice that we have to be aware of so that we don't fall into one extreme or another. And the key is that when we- when we have the right attitude of trying to walk in the path of the Lord, in the way of the Lord, that we do find that the relations that we have in our lives fall into order with God, with our neighbors, with- with ourselves, with the world.

St. Paul asks in the 1st Letter to the Corinthians, "What do you have that you have not received?" And the answer to that is, basically nothing. Everything I have has been given to me by God and therefore the relationship that I should have with God, that just relationship that I should have with God is one of- of adoration and bowing down to him and praising him and thanking him. We did not create ourselves and therefore God does not owe us anything. God does not owe us anything. We have received everything from him. This is really beautiful, and we cannot forget that because everyone else has received the same free gift of God as well, the free gift of life, the free gift of- of faith, the free gift of all the virtues that we have.

So, we're not in charge, actually, and when we think of justice, maybe we think of a court of law, you know, meeting out justice. Or when somebody does an injustice to us, then we really know what- what justice is, we have an idea of justice, right? That- that- that we see that as not being lived up to and we become very upset about that. And in fact, little kids have a deep sense of justice, right, and- and they would like everything to be equal, they want the same attention as their brother or sister from their mother or father and they get jealous, they don't get the same attention, and so on. And this sense of, this, you know, the sense of what- what we would normally think of- of justice is- is developed early on and- and yet that sense of justice, which is a primitive sense of justice, is- is not- it's not very sophisticated and therefore, it- it's really just a simplification of the virtue of justice

because the virtue of justice is not just score settling. And it's not just making everything symmetrical again, you know, because somebody tipped the balance in an asymmetrical way by- by stealing something from us that we're- we have to take that back, you know, that's the law of Hammurabi or the- the- the law of the talion, eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. And maybe that was- that law that Hammurabi legislated was actually good in its day because people were plucking each other's eyes, but then the other guy would take the guy's life and then Hammurabi said no eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. So, if they take one tooth from you, you can take their tooth. But, what a terrible sense of justice that is. That sense of justice is just score settling and revenge. It doesn't do anything, right? It doesn't bring you your eye back and it doesn't bring your tooth back. So, why are you going to pluck somebody else's eye out as well? We have- we have to do much thinking about justice, right, before we get into the mentality of revenge.

And really, to understand this, first we should know that there is no perfect justice here, that we, even if we are wronged, that there is no perfect justice here. This is what St. Thomas Aquinas says. He says, "The desire for justice we can have here, and that's why Our Lord says, 'Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice.'" And he makes a comparison with the philosophers, you know. Before, people who- who studied were called sophi or sages or people who are wise, right. They liked wisdom, they wanted to acquire wisdom. But, Pythagoras, who is one of those early philosophers- ancient philosophers, he did not want to be called a sophos, or a wise person, he wanted to be called a Philo-Sophos, or a philosopher, or the one who loves wisdom. He says, I don't have wisdom, but I love wisdom, I want wisdom, I desire wisdom, but I don't have it. And he says, that's why here on Earth, Our Lord, when he talks about the Beatitudes, he says, happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice. We can hunger and thirst for justice but we have to know that, just like we won't have the perfect wisdom, but we could love wisdom and be philosophers, but not the wise men or women, you know, in the totality of wisdom. We could love justice and desire justice and- but know that we are not going to mete out perfect justice here or achieve perfect justice here. And- and partly because we are working in the realm of gift, we have received everything and, not only that, not only have we received everything we have, we have actually sinned. So, now we're- we're in a position where- where we don't deserve anything, we don't deserve anything at all. And therefore, mercy needs to enter into the equation when we exercise the virtue of justice.

Here's a quotation from Pope Benedict in his encyclical called *Caritas in veritate*, "First of all, justice – ubi societas, ibi ius – every society draws- draws up its own system of justice, where there is society there is also justice or laws. Charity goes beyond justice because, to love is to give, to offer what is mine to the other. But it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is his, what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot give what is mine to the other without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of

all, we are to be just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity, justice is inseparable from charity and intrinsic to it.”

What does this mean that justice needs charity? It's, you know, and charity needs justice, both kind of need each other. Justice is inseparable from charity. Well, what it means first is that we cannot be charitable unless we're just first, that's for sure, because charity goes beyond justice. I give the person what is his or hers first, and- and then I give him what is mine as he- as Pope Benedict says. I cannot give them what is mine if I haven't given them what is theirs first and foremost. And- and then the other thing is that he says- he says elsewhere, I cannot really live charity- or I cannot live a just- in a just society unless there too is a principle of gratuity. In other words, that there is a- a culture of giving, giving beyond what is just. So, think about that, I cannot give people what is theirs if I don't- if it's not found within the culture of giving them more than what is theirs, you know, because then I'll become selfish. I'll become selfish.

And so, we have to watch out for that. We have to watch out for that, especially when in society there's many problems that we need to solve. And there is social problems like poverty, for instance, that well, it is up to society to solve and obviously the Church has a big role to play there, and every family and every person. And then you might say, well, since I can't fix the problem of poverty, world poverty, I'm not- I don't know what to do. What should I do? It's not that. I need the poor. I need the poor. the poor help me to change my outlook on things. And St. Josemaria was very fond of visiting the poor. And- and not because he was going to eradicate the problem. He was a drop in the bucket, you can say, a drop in the ocean. It's not going to do anything if you visit the poor once and there's still going to be poverty tomorrow. The poor you will always have with you. But Mother Teresa was told the same thing- she was told, well, you're not going to fix the problem, so why are you doing this? And she said, we- I don't expect to fix anything. Then why are you doing it? She said, just to show the love of Jesus Christ to this person right here and now, that's all- and that's- that's a lot- a result enough. But also, when we do that and we give, we actually understand a lot more about ourselves, we understand a lot more about our responsibilities, we come out of ourselves, we become more just, if you will, we are now aware of others as well as as our neighbor, and so we are in a better position to give them what is theirs because sometimes it's not so easy to know what is theirs, you know, because we're blinded by the market forces or something like that.

In *Caritas in veritate*, in another point, Pope Benedict says, "Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty." So, we are blinded sometimes and we think we are fixing the world's problems but we are actually hurting the world because we're only thinking about profit and we don't give with that principle of gratuity or giving the extra- giving the extra, you know. And we forget about those vulnerable people.

Like the Pope says in one of his audiences on St. Joseph, he says St. Joseph was born in the peripheries - he's from Nazareth and Bethlehem, and that's where he spends most of his life, in those two cities. In Bethlehem, he's from the city of David, but they're- both of these cities are not Jerusalem. They're insignificant cities, if you want to call them that, they're their towns- little towns, little villages. And- and yet, you know, it is God who always looks to the peripheries and he- he looks to the people who are marginalized, who- people who are poor, people who are sick, people who are ill, those are the people that have a humble heart and are able to actually see God, right.

So, we need the poor because they have something we don't have, they have something we don't have and- and we may have something that they don't have, but we complement each other. This is what St. Catherine of Siena actually says, where she talks about in her dialogue, it's God speaking to her, saying, "I distribute the virtues quite diversely. I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others. I shall give principally charity to one, justice to another, humility to this one, a living faith to that one. And so, I have many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another. I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me."

So, we need the- we need to serve the poor because we need them and they need us, perhaps. We need to come out of a mentality of score settling and revenge in- in- in law, so when someone is- is a victim of a crime, we- we shouldn't think that just punishing the criminal is what settles everything, no. Pope Francis says we need to take care of the victim and then we need to actually, with restorative justice, as it is called, try to help the perpetrator to reform. And that's why he's really against the life imprisonment or the death penalty, because it takes away the hope of that perpetrator to be able to be reinstated in society, you know, at least having that hope, or that- that- that possibility is- is important, you know. And also in our personal lives, you know, when- when somebody does something wrong to us, we should be prone to forgiveness, to forgiving them, you know. And this does not offend justice. A lot of people may think that well, if I forgive them, then I'm doing something against justice, you know, because they don't know whoever did something to my family or they- or to my business, or to my loved one, or whomever, then I am betraying my family member in actually forgiving that perpetrator. Well, actually, the only thing that does violence to justice is an attitude of revenge. What forgiveness does is actually, since it's free, it's always a free gift. Otherwise, there's no forgiveness. It actually does not offend justice, it's part of charity, it becomes part of the law of maximums, the Beatitudes. Not the law of minimums, right, which is the bare minimum that I should do, and that's it. And I start imitating Jesus and ultimately, what is- why should I do it? Because it has been done to me. In other words, Jesus has forgiven me and therefore, I should also forgive one another. This is what Our Lord tells us, this what we say in

the Our Father, many times a day, if we pray the Rosary at least. And therefore, a culture of charity, of free gift, of- that's redundancy, of the principle of gratuity, we could say, just giving of ourselves to others, without counting the cost, without score settling, is the- the soil in which a just person will actually thrive and- and- and be born in the first place.

Let us turn to St. Joseph and Our Lady as we end our prayer today and ask them to help us meditate on how we give God his due through due worship of children by giving our neighbor what he or she needs, and especially, like we say, it is mercy, it is understanding. And lastly, to examine myself so that I am able to improve because I so easily get comfortable and- and, you know, forgive myself too easily. Or maybe not, maybe I'm hard on myself, but- and that could turn into a scruple. But we have to find the right measure, the right measure, and that's why it is important, I think, also the dialogue about- about our own interior life so that we can be guided and- and not, you know, think that our judgment is always infallible. Well, Our Lady and St. Joseph will help us to find that right measure like they did when they prayed.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations which you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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