

April 16, 2021

Happy Friday,

Just a reminder that even though Lent is over, the obligation to do penance on Fridays remains (except for the occasional solemnity). Outside of Lent, we are to choose a penance on Fridays in remembrance of Our Lord's passion and death. This can be giving up meat as in Lent or something else.

1. Today's Readings: [Friday of the Second Week of Easter | USCCB](#)

2. The RE Corner with Jan Heithaus: Our next daughter virtue, distributive justice, is what society owes the individual person, what each individual should receive as his fair share of the common good. Examples of distributive justice are awarding job promotions, selecting among applicants for school admission, drawing the line on who gets government aid, and picking the first string for a sports team. Some common methods of distribution are identifying the most competent, "first come, first served," taking turns, auctioning, equal shares, and being random. Often distributive justice is the fair distribution of burdens, as in deciding military conscription.

Distributive justice is practiced by those in positions of authority—those who have to decide "who gets what." "Those in authority should practice distributive justice wisely, taking account of the needs and contribution of each, with a view to harmony and peace" (Catechism, 2236).

Distributive justice requires those in authority to be of service to others. "Those who exercise authority should do so as a service" (Catechism, 2235). Political leaders who do not really serve are opportunists. Business leaders who do not really serve are plunderers.

Distributive justice takes into account each individual's need (based on a true understanding of human nature), while also considering each individual's merit and society's need. The just society is not one in which there are always equal results. For example, "Catholic social teaching does not maintain that flat, arithmetical equality of income and wealth is a demand of justice . . ." (Economic Justice for All, 74).

3. Quotes of the Day:

~ "if you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the chalice." *St. John Chrysostom*

~ "To live charitably means not looking out for our own interests, but carrying the burdens of the weakest and poorest among us." *Pope Francis*

St. Joseph, Pray for Us!

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Linda McCormick
St. Joseph Catholic Church & School
1200 Cornelia Road
Anderson, SC 29621

Phone: (864) 225-5341, ext. 102
Fax: (864) 225-6432

The Virtue of Justice: Social Justice

The virtue of justice touches on many aspects of the moral life. It springs from the fundamental obligation to give others their due. When individuals do this for one another, we call this reciprocal or commutative justice (we looked at this in a previous article). Now let us turn our attention to social justice (also called distributive justice), wherein we consider the duties of communities towards individuals and the duties of individuals towards communities.

The Exercise of Authority

Social justice has to do with the exercise of authority. *“Human society,”* wrote Blessed Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem et Terris* (#46), *“can be neither well-ordered nor prosperous unless it has some people invested with legitimate authority to preserve its institutions and to devote themselves as far as is necessary to work and care for the good of all.”* The role of those in authority is to ensure the common good, whereas the duty of those subject to authority is to pay them respect and to be loyal.

In recognition of the legitimacy of authority in human society, Jesus says (Mt 22:21), *“Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”* With these words, our Lord also indicates, since everything including Caesar *“belongs to God,”* that earthly authority has its origin in God and needs to be seen within the larger framework of God’s Kingdom.

In his recent book *“Jesus of Nazareth,”* Pope Benedict XVI, commenting on Christ’s words (Mt 28:18), *“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me,”* writes (p. 39), *“Without heaven, earthly power is always ambiguous and fragile. Only when power submits to the measure and the judgment of heaven — of God, in other words — can it become power for good. And only when power stands under God’s blessing can it be trusted.”* The virtue of justice, like all other virtues, requires more than human effort; it needs the grace of God.

The Common Good

Our welfare as individuals is closely linked to the welfare of our family and of society as a whole. In other words, the good of each person is bound up with the

common good. But what do we mean by the common good? The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us an insightful and precise response (#1925), *“The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members.”* This means that persons always have priority over things; at the same time, particular interests of persons or of groups need to yield at times to the larger good of the community as a whole.

We are all equal before God in terms of our human nature and our origin. However, we are obviously not equal in talents. We have great differences of age, physical strength, intellectual abilities, and so forth. These differences, far from becoming a source of contention between us, are intended by God to encourage and even to oblige us to place our unique gifts at the service of one another. St Paul frequently reminds us of this in his New Testament letters (Cf. I Cor 12:4ff, Eph 4:11ff).

Sinful inequalities, however, do exist in scandalous proportions today. Vatican II addressed this social injustice at considerable length, pointing out in *Gaudium et Spes* (#29), *“Their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions. Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace.”*

In light of all the sinful inequalities that threaten the wellbeing of such a vast number of our contemporaries, that destabilize the social fabric of many countries, that complicate efforts for peace, and that prompt large migrations away from inhumane conditions, the Church cannot remain indifferent even if we are tempted to do so. In this regard, Pope Benedict XVI writes in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (#36), *“When we consider the immensity of others’ needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God’s governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a*

resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others.”

Impartiality

To exercise power justly, those in authority need to be impartial. They must not play favorites or give unfair sanctions to some and excessive benefits to others.

Whoever exercises judicial power maintains impartiality by presuming innocence until someone is proven guilty and by deciding cases on the basis of law. As the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy teaches (Dt 1:17), “In rendering judgment, do not consider who a person is; give ear to the lowly and to great alike, fearing no man, for judgment is God’s.”

At the same time, in order to ensure impartiality, the most vulnerable and powerless of society require extra assistance and special consideration. St. James insists on this in his New Testament Epistle (2:1-4), “My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Sit here, please,’ while you say to the poor one, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs?”

Among those requiring extra help from others are persons with mental and other disabilities, the infirm elderly and little children. In these cases, impartiality cannot be achieved without extra vigilance and care by those with authority.

Duty to Worship

Since justice is the virtue that perfects our practice of giving others their due, it leads us naturally to consider our debt to God. Strictly speaking, this debt, i.e. our duty to worship the Lord, is not a case of justice since we could never come close to actually giving to God all that He deserves. However, we can unite ourselves with Jesus in His perfect sacrifice of praise. As St. Peter writes (1 Pt 2:5), “...offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The first three of the Ten Commandments spell out our obligations to God, namely, to worship Him, to honor His holy Name, and to observe the Sabbath. Jesus reiterated our duty in justice to worship God, saying (Mt 4:10), "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve."

And what act of worship is most fitting? The Catechism of the Catholic Church says (#2096), "*Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge Him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love.*" The worship we offer to God ultimately benefits us. As the Catechism teaches (#2097), "*The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world.*"

Love of God and love of neighbor are inextricably bound together. The closer we are to God the more we shall love our neighbor. Love requires us to practice justice, and love makes us capable of doing it. Love also moves us beyond what justice requires to imaging the self-giving love of Christ in our lives.

Source: catholicculture.org by Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted