



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 3rd April 2024

[[Multimedia](#)]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 13. *Justice*

Dear brothers and sisters, Happy Easter, good morning!

Here we are at the second of the cardinal virtues: today we will talk about *justice*. It is the quintessential social virtue. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines it as “the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour” (no. 1807). This is justice. Often, when justice is mentioned, the motto that represents it is also quoted: “*unicuique suum*” — that is, “to each his own”. It is the virtue of law, that seeks to regulate relations between people equitably.

It is represented allegorically by the scales, because it aims to “even the score” between people, especially when they risk being distorted by some imbalance. Its purpose is that everyone in society be treated in accordance with the dignity proper to them. But the ancient masters had already taught that in order for this to occur, other virtuous attitudes are also necessary, such as benevolence, respect, gratitude, affability, and honesty: virtues that contribute to a good coexistence between people. Justice is a virtue for the good coexistence of people.

We all understand that justice is fundamental for peaceful coexistence in society: a world without laws respecting rights would be a world in which it is impossible to live; it would resemble a jungle. Without justice, there is no peace. Without justice, there is no peace. Indeed, if justice is not respected, conflicts arise. Without justice, the law of the prevalence of the strong over the weak becomes entrenched, and this is not just.

But justice is a virtue that acts on both a large and small scale. It has to do not only with the courtroom, but also with the ethics that characterize our daily lives. It establishes sincere relations with others: it realizes the precept of the Gospel, according to which Christian speech is “simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (*Mt 5:37*). Half-truths, double-talk intended to deceive one’s neighbour, the reticence that conceals true intentions, are not attitudes in keeping with justice. The righteous person is upright, simple and straightforward. He does not wear masks, he presents himself for what he is and he speaks the truth. The words “thank you” are often on his lips. He knows that no matter how generous we strive to be, we always remain indebted to our neighbour. If we love, it is also because we were loved first.

In tradition we can find countless descriptions of the righteous person. Let us look at some of them. The righteous person reveres laws and respects them, knowing that they constitute a barrier protecting the defenceless from the tyranny of the powerful. The righteous person does not only think of his own individual well-being, but desires the good of society as a whole. Therefore, he does not give in to the temptation to think only of himself and of taking care of his own affairs, however legitimate they may be, as if they were the only thing that exists in the world. The virtue of justice makes it clear — and places this need in the heart — that there can be no true good for oneself if there is not also the good of all.

Therefore, the righteous person keeps watch over his own behaviour, so that it is not harmful to others. If he makes a mistake, he apologizes. The righteous man always apologizes. In some situations, he goes so far as to sacrifice a personal good to make it available to the community. He desires an orderly society, where people give lustre to the office they hold, and not the office that gives lustre to people. He abhors special treatments and does not trade favours. He loves responsibility and is exemplary in promoting legality. That [legality] indeed, is the path of justice, the antidote to corruption: how important it is to educate people, especially the young, in the culture of legality! It is the way to prevent the cancer of corruption and to eradicate crime, pulling the rug from under its feet.

Furthermore, the righteous person shuns harmful behaviour such as slander, perjury, fraud, usury, mockery and dishonesty. The righteous person keeps his word, returns what he has borrowed, pays fair wages to all labourers: a man who does not pay fair wages to workers is not just, he is unjust. He is careful not to make reckless judgments of his neighbours, and defends the reputation and good name of others.

None of us knows if the righteous people in our world are numerous or if they are as rare as precious pearls. But they are people who draw grace and blessings both upon themselves and upon the world in which they live. They are not losers compared to those who are “cunning and shrewd”, for, as Scripture says, “He who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honour” (*Pr* 21:21). The righteous are not moralists who don the robe of the censor, but upright people who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (*Mt* 5:6), dreamers who yearn in their hearts for universal brotherhood. And, today especially, we are all in great need of this dream. We need to be righteous men and women, and this will make us happy.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from Sweden, Malta, Korea and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

Lastly as usual, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. I hope that each of you will welcome the gifts of joy and peace of the Risen Jesus.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

APPEAL

Unfortunately, sad news continues to come from the Middle East. I reiterate my firm call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. I express my deep regret for the volunteers killed while engaged in the distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza. I pray for them and their families. I renew my appeal for the exhausted and suffering civilian population to be given access to humanitarian aid and for the hostages to be released immediately. Let us avoid all irresponsible attempts to broaden the conflict in the region, and let us work so that this and other wars that continue to bring death and suffering to so many parts of the world may end as soon as possible. Let us pray and work tirelessly for weapons to be silenced and for peace to reign once again.

And let us not forget martyred Ukraine; so many dead! I am holding in my hands a rosary and a copy of the New Testament left behind by a soldier who died in the war. This young man was named Oleksandr — Alexander — and he was 23 years old. Alexander read the New Testament and the Psalms, and in the Book of Psalms, he had underlined Psalm 130: “Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice!”. This 23-year-old young man died in Avdiivka, in the war.

He had his life ahead of him. And this is his rosary and his New Testament, which he read and [with which he] prayed. I would like all of us to take a moment of silence, to think about this young man and many others like him who have died in this madness of war. War always destroys! Let us think of them, and let us pray.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on the virtues, we now turn to justice, which the Catechism describes as “the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour” (No. 1807). Justice is not only a virtue to be practiced by individuals; it is above all a social virtue, for it is directed to the creation of communities in which each person is treated in accordance with his or her innate dignity. Justice is thus the basis of peace. The practice of justice demands the practice of other virtues, such as honesty, integrity, respect for law and commitment to the common good. Jesus calls blessed those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (cf. *Mt* 5:6). How greatly our world, riven by war and manifest inequality, needs men and women firmly committed to the pursuit of justice, so that the human family can live and flourish in unity, solidarity and peace.