



Pope Francis General Audience: Mercy and Justice

2016-02-03



POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 3 February 2016

[Multimedia]

6. Mercy and justice

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

Sacred Scripture presents God to us as infinite mercy and as perfect justice. How do we reconcile the two? How does one reconcile the reality of mercy with the demands of justice? It might appear that the two contradict each other; but in fact it is not so, for it is the very mercy of God that brings true justice to fulfilment. But what kind of justice are we talking about?

If we think of the legal administration of justice, we see that those who consider themselves victims of injustice turn to a judge in a tribunal and ask that justice be done. It is retributive justice, which

inflicts a penalty on the guilty party, according to the principle that each person must be given his or her due. As the Book of Proverbs says: "He who is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die" (11:19). Jesus, too, speaks about it in the parable of the widow who went repeatedly to the judge and asked him: "Vindicate me against my adversary" (Lk 18:3). This path however does not lead to true justice because in reality it does not conquer evil, it merely checks it. Only by responding to it with good can evil be truly overcome.

There is then another way of doing justice, which the Bible presents to us as the royal road to take. It is a process that avoids recourse to the tribunal and allows the victim to face the culprit directly and invite him or her to conversion, helping the person to understand that they are doing evil, thus appealing to their conscience. In this way, by finally repenting and acknowledging their wrong, they can open themselves to the forgiveness that the injured party is offering them. And this is beautiful: after being persuaded that what was done was wrong, the heart opens to the forgiveness being offered to it. This is the way to resolve conflicts in the family, in the relationship between spouses or between parents and children, where the offended party loves the guilty one and wishes to save the bond that unites them. Do not sever that bond, that relationship.

Certainly, this is a difficult journey. It requires that those who have been wronged be ready to forgive and desire good and salvation for their offender. Only in this way can justice triumph, because thus, if the culprit acknowledges the evil done and ceases to do it, the evil is no more; and he who was unjust becomes just, because he is forgiven and is helped to rediscover the path of goodness. And this is where forgiveness and mercy come in.

This is how God acts towards us sinners. The Lord continually offers us his pardon and helps us to accept it and to be aware of our wrong-doing so as to free us of it. For God wants not our condemnation, but our salvation. God does not want to condemn anyone! One of you might ask me: "But Father, didn't Pilate deserve condemnation? Did God want that?" No! God wanted to save Pilate as well as Judas, everyone! He, the Lord of Mercy, wants to save everyone! The difficulty is in allowing him to enter our hearts. Every word of the prophets is a passionate appeal full of love which seeks our conversion. This is what the Lord says through the Prophet Ezekiel: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked... and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (18:23; cf. 33:11), that's what pleases God!

This is the heart of God, the heart of a Father who loves and wants his children to live in goodness and in justice, and thus that they might live to the fullest and be happy. The heart of a Father who goes beyond our little concept of justice to open us to the limitless horizons of his mercy. His is the heart of a Father who does not treat us according to our sins nor repay us according to our faults, as the Psalm says (103[102]:9-10). His is precisely the heart of the father whom we want to encounter when we go to the confessional. Perhaps he will say something to help us better understand our sin, but we all go to find a father who helps us to change our lives; a father who gives us the strength to go on; a father who forgives us in the name of God. That is why being a confessor is such an important responsibility, because that son, that daughter who comes to you is only looking for a father. And you, priest in the confessional, you are there in the place of the Father who does justice with his mercy.

Special greetings:

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including those from the United States of America. May you open your lives to the Lord's gift of mercy, and share this gift with everyone you know. May you be children of the Good Father, missionaries of his merciful love. May God bless you all!

A warm welcome to the Italian-speaking pilgrims! I am delighted to welcome the faithful from the Diocese of Livorno, with Bishop Simone Giusti; participants of the seminar hosted by the University of Santa Croce; students of the Swiss School of Rome and artists of the American Circus. And I thank you! I would like to repeat what I said a week ago, when there was a show like this. You create beauty, and beauty brings us ever closer to God. Thank you for this. But there is another thing that I would like to stress: this is not improvised; behind this spectacle of beauty, there are hours and hours of training that is exhausting. Training is exhausting! The Apostle Paul tells us that in order to arrive at the end and in order to overcome we must train; and this is an example for us all, that the seduction of the easy life, finding a good outcome without making any effort, is a temptation. With what you have done today, and with all the training behind it, you bear witness to us that life without continuous effort is a mediocre life. Thank you so much for your example.

I address an affectionate thought to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today we remember St Blaise, the martyr of Armenia. This holy bishop reminds us of the commitment to proclaim the Gospel even in difficult conditions. Dear young people, become courageous witnesses of your faith; dear sick people, offer up your cross every day for the conversion of those far from the light of Christ; and you, dear newlyweds, be proclaimers of his love, beginning in your family.