

## **One**

### **Definition of Justice**

The second of the Cardinal Virtues is Justice.

What immediately comes to mind when you hear justice? What someone deserves, like a punishment, or worse, vengeance? Or maybe, what is owed to me in the sense of fairness? But actually, justice is the virtue by which you are able to give people what you owe them.

In justice you give people *what they have a right to expect from you*.

But here's an interesting question: what gives people the right to expect anything from you? Where did they get that right in the first place?

## **Two**

### **God is the Foundation of Justice**

How can someone say, "I'm owed this," or even, "I have a right to this"?

Notice too that only certain things have rights, not others. No one owes anything to a rock. There's nothing that belongs to a tree by right. Merely material things don't make claims on us and don't enter into questions of justice.

This is a critical point: *only persons deserve justice*.

All human beings have been created by God with a spiritual soul, to be in His image and likeness. That's why human beings must be treated justly, because of their special stature in relation to God.

As the *Declaration of Independence* states, “They are endowed by their *Creator* with certain unalienable Rights,” and these rights must be taken seriously. The American Founding Fathers recognized this essential truth: that God is the source of human rights, and that justice depends on recognizing His unique love and gifts to humanity.

If we see the human person merely as a random collection of atoms, instead of as a child of God, then we destroy the foundations and we won’t be able to maintain justice.

No wonder then that historically, whenever a society attempted to rid itself of God and religion, the stage was instantly set for widespread injustice.

God is the only safeguard of justice.

## **Three**

### **Justice and Relationship**

Justice is the virtue that’s primarily concerned with the way we deal with other people. That’s what makes justice so important, and the reason why it comes right after prudence in the order of primacy.

With justice, we don’t just realize our own private good, we are also empowered to cultivate the good of relationships. And because justice focuses on other persons, it’s a broader, more encompassing virtue than fortitude and temperance, which focus primarily on the self.

Justice is therefore absolutely essential if we want to be happy. Because without it we’ll fail in building relationships with those around us. And what’s more pitiful, more miserable, than a human being left only with

himself? Such a person is trapped and stifled within the narrow limits of himself. He's self-enclosed, lonely, and unfulfilled.

This brings us to a super-important truth: *those who commit injustice are worse off than those who suffer injustice*. Plato said the one who commits injustice is more to be pitied than his victim. And Jesus Himself, when He was suffering the greatest injustice of all, said, "Do not weep for me. Weep rather for yourselves, and for your children."

Because, after all, a just person has healthy, properly ordered relationships with others, and so has many avenues of escaping his solitude and emptiness, enjoying the goods of friendship and society. But an unjust person cuts off every bridge between himself and another person, and ends in the hell of their own loneliness.

## **Four**

### **Justice and Balance**

Justice is often rightly associated with the notion of "equity" or "fairness." But it's really important to emphasize that when we talk about justice and equity, that doesn't mean that in a just society, everybody winds up being the same or having the same in talent, or wealth, or health, or authority.

That's silly. When two things are described as equal, it means they are the same in every way. All people are equal, the same, in the sense that we are persons with a dignity that must be respected. After that, we are not the same. We are all different and that is a good thing because that is what makes each person unique and unrepeatable.

But we are not all the same, thank God. So don't make justice about making everyone the same and destroying all the differences that make each person and the world beautiful.

But since we are all equal because we are all human persons, we all have to treat each other as equally important in the most basic sense. We are all equally God's children, we all have the same right to be shown respect and goodwill.

And, importantly, when we interact with each other, especially when we've made commitments to one another, we have to recognize that the good you do for me demands that I do a proportionate amount of good for you.

So, for instance, if my boss gives me a fair day's wage, I owe him a proportional amount of service in return. And if someone comes to do work on my house, if he does good work, I owe him an amount of money that's proportionate to the value he's contributed to me.

Justice does not mean I have some bogus right to an equal amount of money or fame or influence as anybody else but in the sense that when we receive something, money or goods or services, we should consider ourselves obliged, and indebted, and should try to give something of roughly equal value in return.

That's justice. It goes for families and friends and towns and economic systems and international communities.

## **Five**

### **Justice and Love**

Justice is a great virtue. It preserves the fundamental good of relationship by making sure that when I pursue *my* good, I don't do it at the expense of *your* good.

But actually, for relationships really to thrive, we have to go beyond the limits of strict contractual equivalence. The fulfillment of justice can be found, ultimately, only in love. Because love is the greatest virtue. It unites one who loves with the one who is loved.

With justice, there's still a tension between your good and my good, and I have to be careful that I don't damage yours by seeking mine. But with love, that tension disappears. Because I love you, the good that I want, that I desire *is your good*. So, we don't have to fight about what you owe and what I owe. Love says, "The good I want, the good I will work for, is your good, your happiness."

That's how God loves us. That's how, by His grace, we may become capable of loving one another.