

# One

## Justice and Relationships

Am I a good person? Am I just?

Justice is about giving people what you owe them and not taking away what they have a right to. When we do that, the result is good relationships. So, justice is the virtue that makes good relationships.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church mentions three kinds of justice: *commutative, distributive, and general.*

*Commutative justice* is the kind of justice we owe our peers. It's when we give our spouse, or a colleague, or a friend what we owe them, and we don't deprive them of anything they have a right to.

Let's do a little examination of conscience related to justice.

Am I giving my spouse the love and honor I owe her or him? Do I think about what they need and then anticipate and take action to fulfill those needs without them asking? Or do I just fall into the trap of thinking of my own wants and needs? Do I even know my spouse well enough to really know what they need? Maybe that is the best place to begin by getting to know my spouse better so I can love, I can give to them better.

How about at work? Am I communicating in a way that respects those I work with? Do I respond in a timely manner to messages? Do I keep people informed? Do I take into consideration how my decisions and actions affect them or do I just do what I think needs to be done the way I want? Do I meet deadlines and follow through with things so that others don't have to pick up slack? Do I take the initiative to problem

solve or do I leave that to others out of laziness? Do I sew a cancer in the team by gossip and politicking?

Am I just toward my siblings? Am I taking care of my share of the responsibility toward our elderly parents or have I left it to others?

How about justice toward your friends? This usually revolves around communication, trust, and respect. Do I take the initiative to get together with my circle of friends or have I been unresponsive leading to feelings of neglect? Do I consistently cancel plans or fail to follow through on promises which can make friends feel undervalued?

One-sidedness is an injustice. When one person feels they are putting more effort into the friendship than the other...

Are we trustworthy in our friendships or have we broken trust by revealing things were supposed to be confidential, or by gossiping? Betrayal is one of the worst forms of injustice in friendships. I mean, look what Judas did to his friend Jesus.

## **Two**

**Justice is not just about what we owe people, it also considers what we should not deprive them of.**

Justice asks, "What do I owe my neighbor?" But in justice, we also make sure we are not depriving people of things they need. This is where the Ten Commandments come in. Let's look at just a few of them:

Innocent persons have a right to their lives. Murder (particularly abortion) is the violation of that right, and so is unjust.

Before engaging in any sexual activity, our partner has a right to a full, personal commitment, which can only take place through marriage. Fornication and adultery is the violation of that right, and so is unjust.

Persons have a right to certain material possessions. Theft or swindling is the violation of that right. (Note: this includes any kind of scam, where profit for one party depends on the loss of another party).

Others have a right to a good name, a good reputation. Gossip or slander is the violation of that right, and so is unjust.

Everyone has the right to be treated courteously. Rudeness is the violation of that right, and so is unjust.

Each person has the right to be respected. Malicious mockery (that is, to make fun of someone with the purpose of belittling him) is the violation of that right, and so is unjust.

Persons have the right to their spiritual dignity, that is, to be appreciated for their full personal value (as opposed to being treated as a merely physical object). Pornography is the violation of that right, and so is unjust.

Others have the right to our good example. Scandal is the violation of that right, and so is unjust.

Innocent and sincere persons have the right to truth. Lying is the violation of that right, and so it is unjust.

So you see, the Ten Commandments aren't just about arbitrary rules. They're about justice and the good of relationship. They're about giving people what you owe them, and not taking away what they have a right to.

## Three

### Distributive Justice

Peer-to-peer justice is the most basic, familiar kind of justice. But human relationships aren't just about relationships between people in an equal position. Some people have authority over others and they have to exercise that authority justly.

This is called *distributive justice*, which is the justice where those in authority must make sure they're being just to those under their authority.

The reason we have authorities is because we need communities, and a community requires that there be some kind of governance. An authority exists to take care of the community and the common good. But the person with authority has to recognize that the community contains many individuals and that each of these individuals has rights.

So distributive justice is the justice that concerns the obligations of the community to the individual, as carried out by the rightful authority.

In other words, whether you're a father, a mother, the owner of a business, a boss, a pastor, or a politician, you have to make sure that *your goals for the community respect the good of each and every individual under your authority*. Anything less is simply an unjust abuse of power.

So let's ask ourselves, Who is under my authority and care and am I giving them what I owe them, am I giving them what they really need?

Consider each of your children, your employees or the people you manage. If each of those people under your responsibility were asked

and they answered fearlessly and frankly – would they say you are just toward them?

## **Four**

### **General/Legal Justice**

So we've talked about the obligations of one individual to another individual, and the obligations of the society, and the one who leads it, to the individual. But there's also *General Justice*, which is about the individual fulfilling his obligations to the society he's a part of.

We owe a lot to our families. We owe a lot to our places of work. We owe a lot to the nation. We owe a lot to our parishes, and to the universal Church.

General justice is where you recognize your debt and the corresponding obligation it imposes.

General justice is where you recognize that “giving back to your community” isn't just some extreme form of altruism or community spirit. It's just a basic demand of justice.

It's what prevents you from becoming a leech on society, a self-entitled brat in your family, a lazy free-rider at work, a worthless, self-serving member of the mystical body that is the Church.

General justice demands that we respect the legitimate authorities of our communities and that we be committed to serving, not just taking, from the society we're part of.

## **Five**

### **Why You Need Them All**

We need all these forms of justice.

Without a sense of General Justice and our obligations to society, we become lazy, selfish, and self-entitled. Without a sense of Distributive Justice and a sense of the rights of the individual, you get a totalitarian state – whether communist or fascist – in which any individual or even large groups can be sacrificed, tortured, violated, falsely convicted, and liquidated for political aims. And without a sense of Commutative Justice, a sense that I have to treat my peers with the same respect and consideration I think I deserve, we all just become hideous jerks to one another – and that doesn't lead to happiness for anybody.

So take a moment to consider your peers, the people under your authority, and the societies you're part of. And if you get the sense that you haven't been fulfilling your obligations in one of those areas, make a resolution to help you be more just. And ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to make good on that resolution.