



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 8 November 1978*

1. During these first audiences in which I have the fortune to meet you, who come here from Rome, Italy, and from so many other countries, I wish, as I said already on 25 October, to continue to develop the subjects chosen by John Paul I, my Predecessor. He wished to speak not only of the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity, but also of the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. He saw in them—all together—seven lamps, as it were, of sanctification. God called him to eternity, and he was able to speak only of the three principal ones: faith, hope and charity, which illuminate the Christian's whole life. His unworthy Successor, in meeting with you to reflect, in the spirit of his late Predecessor, on the cardinal virtues, wishes to light, in a certain sense, the other lamps at his tomb.

2. Today, it falls to me to speak of justice. It is perhaps well that this should be the subject of the first catechesis in the month of November. This month, in fact, induces us to fix our gaze on the life of every man, and at the same time on the life of the whole of mankind, in the perspective of final justice. We are all aware, somehow, that in this transitory world, it is not possible to achieve the full measure of justice. The words so often heard: "There is no justice in this world" are, perhaps, the fruit of an oversimplification that is too facile. But they contain a principle of deep truth all the same.

Justice is, in a certain way, greater than man, than the dimensions of his earthly life, than the possibilities of establishing in this life fully just relations among men, environments, societies and social groups, nations, and so on. Every man lives and dies with a certain sense of an insatiable hunger for justice, since the world is not able to satisfy fully a being created in the image of God, either in the depths of his person or in the various aspects of his human life. And thus, by means of this hunger for justice, man turns to God who "is justice itself". Jesus expressed this very clearly

and concisely in the Sermon on the Mount, when he said: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Mt 5:6).

3. Having this evangelical sense of justice before our eyes, we must consider it at the same time a fundamental dimension of man's life on earth: the life of man, of society, of humanity. This is the ethical dimension. Justice is the fundamental principle of the existence and the coexistence of men, as well as of human communities, societies and peoples. Furthermore, justice is the principle of the existence of the Church, as the People of God, and the principle of coexistence of the Church and the various social structures; in particular of the state, as well as of international organizations. In this wide and differentiated area, man and mankind are continually seeking justice: this is a perennial process and it is a task of supreme importance.

According to the different relationships and different aspects, justice has obtained more appropriate definitions throughout the centuries. Hence the concept of justice: communicative, distributive, legal and social. All this testifies what a fundamental significance justice has for the moral order among men, in social and international relations. It can be said that the very meaning of man's existence on earth is bound up with justice. To define correctly "how much is due" to each one from all and at the same time to all from each one, "what is due" (*debitum*) to man from man in different systems and relationships—to define, and above all to put into practice!—is a great thing, through which every man lives, and thanks to which his life has a meaning.

Therefore there remains, during the centuries of human existence on earth, a continual effort and a continuous struggle to organize in accordance with justice the whole of social life in its various aspects. It is necessary to view with respect the multiple programmes and the activity, sometimes reformative, of various trends and systems. It is necessary, at the same time, to be aware that here it is not a question in the first place of systems, but of justice and of man. The system must be for man, not man for the system.

Therefore defence is necessary against the hardening of the system. I am thinking of social, economic, political and cultural systems, which must be sensitive to man, to his complete good. They must be able to reform themselves, their own structures, according to what the full truth about man requires. The great effort of our times, which aims at defining and consolidating "human rights" in the life of present-day mankind, peoples, and states, must be evaluated from this point of view.

The Church of our century remains in continual dialogue on the great front of the modern world, as is testified to by many encyclicals of the Popes and the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council. The present Pope will certainly have to return repeatedly to these matters. In today's brief exposition, all that can be done is to draw attention to this vast and differentiated area.

4. Each of us, then, must be able to live in a context of justice and, even more, each of us must be

just and act justly with regard to those near us and those who are far away, with regard to the community, to the society of which one is a member... and with regard to God.

Justice has many references and many forms. There is also a form of justice which regards what man "owes" God. This is a vast subject in itself. I will not develop it now, although I cannot abstain from indicating it.

Let us give our attention, meanwhile, to men. Christ left us the commandment to love our neighbour. In this commandment, everything that concerns justice is also contained. There can be no love without justice. Love "surpasses" justice, but at the same time it finds its verification in justice. Even a father and a mother, loving their own child, must be just in his regard. If justice is uncertain, love, too, runs a risk.

To be just means giving each one what is due to him. This concerns temporal goods, of a material nature. The best example here can be remuneration for work or the so-called right to the fruits of one's own work or of one's own land. But to man is due also his good name, respect, consideration, the reputation he has deserved. The more we know a man, the more his personality, his character, his intellect and his heart are revealed to us. And the more we realize—and we must realize!—with what criterion to "measure him" and what it means to be just towards him.

It is necessary, therefore, to deepen our knowledge of justice continually. It is not a theoretical science. It is virtue, it is capacity of the human spirit, of the human will and also of the heart. It is also necessary to pray in order to be just and to know how to be just.

We cannot forget Our Lord's words: "The measure you give will be the measure you get" (Mt 7:2).

A just man is a man of a "just measure".

May we all be so!

May we all strive constantly to become so!

My blessing to all.

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