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Angelus: the clear distinction between justice and vengeance

At midday the Holy Father appeared at the window of his study to pray the Angelus with the faithful and pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square. The Pope commented on this Sunday's Gospel reading, "one of those pages that best expresses the Christian 'revolution in which Jesus shows the way of true justice through the law of love that surpasses that of retaliation, that is, 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. This ancient rule imposed the infliction of punishments on transgressors equivalent to the damages caused: death to those who killed, amputation to those who wounded others, and so on. Jesus does not ask His disciples to submit to evil; rather, He asks them to react, but not with another evil, but with goodness. Only in this way can the chain of evil be broken ... and can things truly change. Indeed, evil is a void, a void of goodness, and a void cannot be filled with another void, but only with fullness, that is, with goodness. Reprisals never lead to the resolution of conflicts. 'You did this to me, I will do it to you': this never resolves a conflict, nor is it Christian".

"For Jesus, the rejection of violence can also imply renouncing a legitimate right; and He gives some examples of this: turning the other cheek, giving one's cloak or one's money, accepting other sacrifices. But this renunciation does not mean that the demands of justice are ignored or contradicted: no, on the contrary, Christian love, which manifests itself in a special way in mercy, represents a higher realisation of justice. What Jesus wants to teach us is the clear distinction we must make between justice and vengeance – to distinguish between justice and vengeance. Revenge is never just. We are permitted to ask for justice; it is our duty to practice justice. However we are forbidden from taking revenge or in some way fomenting vengeance, inasmuch as it is an expression of hatred and violence.

"Jesus does not wish to promote a new civil order, but rather the commandment to love our neighbour, which also includes loving our enemies. 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (v. 44). And this is not easy. This word is not understood as approval of the evil done by an enemy, but as an invitation to a higher magnanimous perspective, similar to that of the heavenly Father, Who, Jesus says, 'makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'. Indeed, even the enemy is a human being, created as such in God's image, even if at present this image is obscured by unworthy conduct".

"When we speak of 'enemies', we must not think of those different and far from us; let us think of ourselves too, we who can enter into conflict with our neighbour, at times with our relatives. How many enmities there are in families! Let us think of this. Enemies are also those who speak badly of us, who slander us and wrong us. And

it is not easy to accept this. We are called to respond to all these with goodness, which also has its own strategies, inspired by love”.

“May the Virgin Mary help us to follow Jesus on this demanding path, that truly exalts human dignity and makes us live as the children of our Father in heaven”, concluded the Holy Father. “May she help us practice patience, dialogue, forgiveness, and thereby be artisans of communion, artisans of fraternity in our daily life, especially in our family”.
