

FATHER REGINALD E. MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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A REFLECTION ON THE SACRED AND IMMACULATE HEARTS

Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

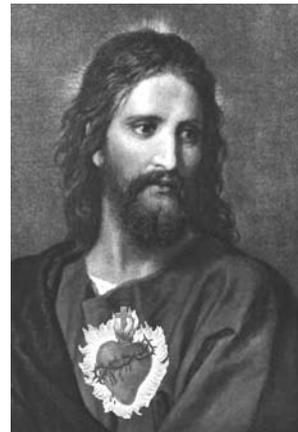
Although I write these words on Easter Monday, at the very beginning of the Easter season, our friends will not read them until our Easter celebrations have drawn to a close. I am always sad to see the Paschal Candle and the other signs of Easter disappear from the sanctuary, but the close of the Easter season invites us to look forward to other, magnificent liturgical feasts: Pentecost, the Ascension of the Lord, Corpus Christi, and the days set aside to honor the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of His mother.

Each day, the Mass opens a window onto eternity that allows us to stand at the foot of the cross with Mary and the disciple Jesus loved. The Church's liturgical feasts and seasons call special attention to the great events and heroes of our faith, but the Mass, and the Eucharist reposing in the tabernacle, guarantee that the reality of Easter need never be far from our minds.

We may say the same thing about the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin. The Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries draw us especially close to the great, saving events of our faith. But each of the other mysteries – if we allow it to – prepares us for Easter, by extending an invitation to unite ourselves with the hearts of Jesus and Mary, both of whom are models for the obedience to God's providential will that saves us.

I have said before that, in recent years, we have done two things with our hearts, neither of them particularly helpful to our spiritual life. On the one hand, we have promoted the care of our physical heart to such an extent that every other part or function of the human body pales in significance. On the other hand, we have sentimentalized the heart until it has been reduced to nothing more than a decorative symbol on greeting cards and bumper stickers.

The feasts of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts call us to an understanding of the heart we find in the Scripture, where the inspired authors see the heart as the source of all our emotions, needs, desires,



THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS



THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

and strengths. This is the point Jesus makes when He tells us we will find our hearts where we find our treasure. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers this magnificent observation about the immensity of the human heart

The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live... "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant. (CCC, 2563)

This prospect can be a threat or a blessing, depending on how highly we value our hearts, and what we do with them. If we throw them away, allowing ourselves to be beguiled by inferior goods, we may look forward to a suitable punishment. If, by contrast, we follow the lead of Jesus and His mother, opening our hearts to others, especially those in need, we can look forward to Jesus' consoling invitation, "Come, O blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world" (Mt. 25:34).

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Moral Virtues: II JUSTICE

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

A QUESTION OF RIGHTS

The second moral virtue to consider is the virtue of Justice. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus we encounter what often seems like a startling admonition. “*You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor*” (Lev. 19:15). Refusing to be intimidated by another’s wealth or status makes a great deal of sense – Americans are particularly proud of their political institutions which deny a system of social classes – but surely, we imagine, the poor must have a greater claim on our attention.

While this is certainly the case when we are considering charitable gift-giving, the matter is quite different when we consider the rights of individuals, and the behavior such rights demand of us. These rights govern our relations with one another, and they arise from the inherent equality that exists among individuals in society. Justice is the virtue that concerns itself with this equality, and it is defined as “*the perpetual and constant will to render to each one his right*” (ST II-II: 58.1). These words deserve some study, to enable us to understand fully what Justice is, and what it demands of us. Let us first consider the will.

GIVING WHAT EACH DESERVES

We have seen that freedom is an essential component to virtue. For an act to be virtuous, we must freely choose – or will – it. The “perpetual and constant” qualities contained in the definition remind us that virtues are habitual dispositions, strengthened by repetition. Any virtue, acquired by practice and perfected by grace, becomes a firm and unyielding choice, what we often call a “second nature.” Justice is our choice to give each person whatever is his or her due.

JUSTICE AND “THE OTHER”

Justice is *only* concerned with our dealings with others, and in this way it differs from the other virtues, which perfect the individual person in relation to himself. Our practice of the other virtues certainly affects the way we approach one another in the world, but this virtuous behavior is the *result* of a habit we have first incorporated into our way of thinking and acting.

Justice, by contrast, is concerned absolutely with our relations to others. To be sure, Justice is a habit, so our personal practice of justice becomes easier and more graceful with experience and time, but the very definition of Justice specifies that this virtue governs our relations to others, directing us always to give them their due.

In art, Justice is often portrayed as blind-folded. This is to underscore the equality that Justice seeks always to achieve. The command from Leviticus to avoid partiality is a command to embrace equality. Whether a person is poor or rich is unimportant in Justice; what matters is that each receives whatever is due him.

A MATTER OF EQUALITY

In our everyday life, Justice sheds its blindfold – not in the sense that we allow ourselves to be tyrannized by others’ poverty, wealth, appearance or any other external quality, but in the sense that we look about and freely choose to treat others as our equals. Justice demands that this be our *constant* disposition, so we may occasionally find Justice difficult to practice, especially if granting another person his due means giving up something of our own. But that in no way relieves us of the responsibility to behave justly. Indeed, our society would collapse if we were to forget the place and importance of Justice.

Thus far, we have considered Justice as the dealings between individuals, in the interest of the common good. But we must also acknowledge that Justice governs the individual’s dealings with society itself, and a society’s dealings with the individuals who make it up.

AN EXAMPLE FROM ECONOMICS

A good example of the Justice that governs dealings between individuals is that of a market, in which one person offers another a sum of money equal to the value of the object he purchases. The relations between individuals and society are slightly different, because the equality between the society and the individual depends on the degree to which an individual participates in the society. Someone who earns a great deal of money, whether from investments, manufacturing some necessary goods, or providing a service plays a greater role in society than a retiree dependent on Social Security.

One is not necessarily a better person than the other, but the materially poorer of the two plays a smaller role in society and therefore deserves to be taxed a proportionately smaller share of the society’s expenses. Each person, however, is required by Justice to support the society in which he lives.

In return, Justice demands that society offer individuals whatever they need to participate fully in civil life. Individuals congregate together because life is easier when lived in common. A just society takes nothing away from its citizens, and supports the individual’s efforts to achieve his full potential as a virtuous human being.

THE RELATION OF JUSTICE TO GOD

Justice allies to itself a number of noble activities, which we call “parts of Justice”. Among these are religion, devotion, piety, prayer, gratitude, and truth. The names of these actions appropriately suggest relations with God, and while these acts are meritorious, they cannot share the full perfection of Justice, which concerns itself with the equality between individuals, and giving each person what she or he is due. Obviously, we can never render God everything due Him, nor can we even consider the possibility of equality with God. Therefore, we may act virtuously in our relations with God, but our actions will, necessarily, always fall short of the perfection of Justice.

Nevertheless, the acts by which we seek to unite ourselves with God are extremely important. Religion is the honor we pay God. It is distinct from the other parts of Justice because it is an act we offer solely to God. Devotion is the willingness with which we offer ourselves to God’s service.

PIETY AND PRAYER

Piety is the respect and honor subjects pay to superiors. We offer this respect primarily to God, who rules over all things, but we also demonstrate piety in the regard we pay family members, especially parents, and in the respect we show toward our nation and its symbols.

Prayer reminds us that we must turn to God for our necessities. Since God knows what we need before do, prayer does nothing for God. On the other hand, it does a great deal for us, preparing us and making us worthy to receive God’s blessings. Roman Catholics are sometimes accused of idolatry, because they turn to the saints in prayer. To answer this charge, we must distinguish between a prayer that is offered to a person, a petition to be fulfilled by him, and prayer which seeks something through a person.

Only God can grant the salvation we need, of course, so we appropriately pray to God alone. However, our faith assures us that the angels and saints continually beseech God on our behalf, so we may reasonably ask to unite our prayers with theirs. We may offer one further remark on prayer, by observing the maxim that teaches, “the Church believes as it prays.” When we offer prayer to one person of the Trinity, or to the Trinity itself, we appropriately ask, “Have mercy on us.” When we approach the Blessed Virgin or another of the saints, we say, “Pray for us.”

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is nothing more than the thanks we express for a favor we have received. It differs from the worship we offer God, and the honor we show our parents, because those actions recognize the on-going relation we enjoy with the individuals we honor. Gratitude is thanks for a specific gift, and the extent of our gratitude is measured in proportion to the gift we have received. When we sin and are reconciled to God through the Sacrament of Penance, our gratitude is objectively greater than the thanks we offer when God’s grace enables us to avoid some temptation. The reason is that sacramental reconciliation is a greater gift.

TRUTH

Truth is related to Justice because it is one of the virtuous ways in which we deal with others. Like the other virtues, truth makes us good and renders our action good. We have an obligation to make certain that our words and actions accurately – and appropriately – express what we believe, and who we truly are. This accuracy does justice to us, by presenting a true picture of us, and honors those with whom we interact, by giving them what they have a right to expect. Nevertheless, we must not underestimate or ignore the element of propriety when we consider truth. Truth is the mean between revealing too much and too little, between speaking rashly and speaking at the right time.

VICES OPPOSED TO JUSTICE

When we consider the various parts of Justice, and how they make us and our actions good, we can easily see how sacrilege, superstition, lying, hypocrisy, boasting, irony (which is belittling ourselves or others) and ingratitude sin against the virtue of Justice. These actions either deny God or another individual the honor we owe, or they exceed (or fail to reach) the middle course which is the mean of Justice.

THE VALUE OF FRIENDSHIP

By contrast, the affability or friendliness we bring to our dealings with others is a reflection of Justice because it urges us to behave toward others in a fitting or becoming manner. This is different from the love commanded by the virtue of Charity, which is an interior disposition. Affability concerns itself with externals, “getting along with” others, and contributing to the pleasure we derive from social events. Like the other virtues, this friendliness must observe a happy medium, avoiding mere flattery and the temptation to seek peace at any cost, even at the cost of truth.

SOME MODIFYING FACTORS

We began this reflection by observing that Justice demands strict equality in our dealings with others. We shall bring our thoughts to a close by considering the one instance in which this demand may be set aside. The purpose of law is to preserve the common good of those who live under it. By necessity, then, laws must be broad or general enough to govern the largest possible number of human actions. If law is ignored, individuals – and the society they form – will suffer.

Justice seeks to guarantee that each individual receives her or his due in a particular instance. But what will happen if a person demands a right at an improper time, or for an improper reason? Individuals certainly have a right to buy poisons to kill household pests, but if someone exercises this right because he wishes to kill himself or another person, we may reasonably law aside the letter of the law, and, for the sake of the common good, deny the individual his right.

MARY, THE MODEL OF JUSTICE

The Mother of God is our model in all things. In the legends that grew up to describe her birth

and childhood, we find Mary's parents promising to consecrate "her to the Lord from her infancy." Such a promise, made to God, carries immense significance, and the legend continues that when Mary was three years old, her parents fulfilled their promise and brought her to the Temple, where she was to be reared and educated.

From her earliest days, then, Mary was aware of the magnitude of Justice, and when she reached maturity – and ran to share the good news of the Incarnation with Elizabeth – Justice is the theme of her great *Magnificat*, praising the God whose scrutiny of hearts results in overthrowing tyrants and granting equity to the disenfranchised. ■

SACRED & IMMACULATE HEARTS (Pg. 1 Cont.)

The great medieval Franciscan, St. Bonaventure, reflected thus on the heart of Jesus

O soul devoted to God, whoever you may be, run to this source of life and light with eager longing. And with the power of your inmost heart cry out to Him: "O indescribably beauty of God most high! O life that gives life to all life! O light that illumines every light, and preserves in its undying splendor the myriad flames that have shone before the throne of your godhead from the dawn of time!"

The Sacred Heart of Jesus provides a model for our hearts. His unwavering love for the Father, and the humankind God created, led Jesus to the cross, to redeem a debt we had contracted but had no way of paying. To honor Christ's heart is to dedicate our own hearts – and all they represent – at the same unselfish service.

If the example of Christ is too daunting, or if we wonder how we can dedicate our hearts to God's service in the everyday reality of our lives, we need look no further than our Blessed Mother, whose own heart was as troubled and puzzled as ours so often are. The 15th Century Venetian saint, Lawrence Justinian, preached

As Mary pondered all she had learned from reading and from what she had heard and seen, how greatly did she increase in faith, advance in merit and become enlightened with wisdom!

Here we have a perfect illustration of Christian spiritual life, in which – like Mary – we are drawn to the unseen by means of "what she had heard and seen." Most of us will not hear or see God's angels, but each of us can grow in wisdom by thinking seriously about what we do hear and see. The cry of a child, the touch of a loved one, our surrender to the everyday tasks that face us – each of these can teach us a lesson in holiness if we allow ourselves to see the God behind the events that surround us.

St. Lawrence's sermon continues,

Imitate her, O faithful soul. Enter into the temple of your heart that you may be purified in spirit and cleansed of the pollution of your sins. In everything

we do God considers our disposition rather than our actions. And so, whether we retire mentally to God in earnest contemplation...or whether we are intent on being of service to those around us with good works and worthy undertakings, let our object be that we are motivated only by a love of Christ.

St. Therese of Lisieux is one of the Church's favorite saints. Part of her popularity is no doubt due to the dramatic shortness of her life; she entered the convent at the age of fifteen, and died a mere nine years later. We make a grave mistake, however, if we imagine hers was an easy life. She suffered painful physical illness, as well as a number of spiritual trials. In spite of these hardships – or, perhaps, because of them – she developed a remarkable awareness of God's love at work in the world. She said, "To pick up a pin for love can convert a soul." Love, the movement of the heart, is the essential element in the Christian life. Once we place our hearts at God's disposal – as His Son and His Son's mother did – the world becomes a sacramental place that reveals God wherever we turn. ■

MORE MILESTONES

FOR A REMARKABLE PRIEST

When the friends of the Rosary Center receive this issue of "Light and Life," Fr. Duffner will have celebrated his 95th birthday. In addition, he looks forward, in December, to celebrating the 70th anniversary of his ordination.

Fr. Duffner is a legend in the Western Dominican Province. He served as novice master for 15 years, sharing the fruits of his study and prayer with the many young men who sought to embrace priesthood in the Dominican Order. An entire generation of Dominican leaders benefited from his careful training, and his personal touch is evident in many ways throughout the Western Province, not least in the ministry of the Rosary Center.

Fr. Duffner directed the Rosary Center from 1983 to 2004, and the Center continues to receive letters from friends who remember some helpful or consoling word. He continues to work daily at the Rosary Center, humbly performing an array of necessary tasks. He is highly regarded as a confessor, and spends many hours each week offering God's reconciliation and healing to the penitents who seek him out, many traveling long distances to do so. Let us offer a prayer for our beloved priest, director, and friend. *Ad multos annos!*

The reflections Fr. Duffner wrote for "Light and Life" are a popular item for sale at the Rosary Center. They fill two volumes, which may be ordered together (at a discount) or separately. These reflections are brief, scholarly, edifying, and comprehensive. The publisher described them as "Everything you need to know about the Faith, in ten-minute segments!" The brevity of these reflections makes them an ideal companion for daily meditation. To order, please see the enclosed form.