

Pope Takes up Justice as Theme for Lent

Says Man Must Accept His Reliance on God

VATICAN CITY, FEB. 4, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Divine justice -- so radically different from its human counterpart -- puts man before the truth that he is not self-sufficient and depends on Another to be fulfilled, Benedict XVI says.

The Pope made this reflection in his message for Lent this year, which was released today. The message is dated Oct. 30. Ash Wednesday is Feb. 17.

The Holy Father took up the theme of justice, considering its human understanding and the justice of God.

In common usage, he said, justice "implies 'to render to every man his due.' [...] In reality, however, this classical definition does not specify what 'due' is to be rendered to each person. What man needs most cannot be guaranteed to him by law. In order to live life to the full, something more intimate is necessary that can be granted only as a gift: We could say that man lives by that love which only God can communicate since he created the human person in his image and likeness."

Injustice, on the other hand, is rooted in the heart, the Pontiff said: "Its origin lies in the human heart, where the seeds are found of a mysterious cooperation with evil."

The human being is by nature "open to sharing freely," he continued, "but he finds in his being a strange force of gravity that makes him turn in and affirm himself above and against others: This is egoism, the result of original sin."

So how can man free himself from selfishness and open himself to love, Benedict XVI asked.

God and neighbor

He reflected on the intuition of the Chosen People, where a link is understood to exist between faith in God and justice toward neighbors.

"The Hebrew word itself that indicates the virtue of justice, *sedaqah*, expresses this well. *Sedaqah*, in fact, signifies on the one hand full acceptance of the will of the God of Israel; on the other hand, equity in relation to one's neighbour," he explained.

The Holy Father added that "the two meanings are linked because giving to the poor for the Israelite is none other than restoring what is owed to God, who had pity on the misery of his people."

What is his

The Pope went on to reflect on Christ as the justice of God. Christ's justice, he said, "is the justice that comes from grace, where it is not man who makes amends, heals himself and others. [...] It is not man's sacrifices that free him from the weight of his faults, but the loving act of God who opens himself in the extreme, even to the point of bearing in himself the 'curse' due to man so as to give in return the 'blessing' due to God."

In this scheme, the Holy Father acknowledged, it seems that "each one receives the contrary of his 'due.'"

But, he said, "In reality, here we discover divine justice, which is so profoundly different from its human counterpart. God has paid for us the price of the exchange in his Son, a price that is truly exorbitant. Before the justice of the cross, man may rebel for this reveals how man is not a self-sufficient being, but in need of Another in order to realize himself fully. Conversion to Christ, believing in the Gospel, ultimately means this: to exit the illusion of self-sufficiency in order to discover and accept one's own need. [...] Humility is required to accept that I need Another to free me from 'what is mine,' to give me gratuitously 'what is his.'"

When a Christian is strengthened by this experience, the Pope explained, then he is "moved to contribute to creating just societies, where all receive what is necessary to live according to the dignity proper to the human person and where justice is enlivened by love."

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