

From Your Pastor

Following is an excerpt from this year's message
from the Holy Father for the Season of Lent.



MESSAGE OF POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR LENT 2010

*"The justice of God has been manifested
□ through faith in Jesus Christ" (cf. Rm 3, 21-22)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

Each year, on the occasion of Lent, the Church invites us to a sincere review of our life in light of the teachings of the Gospel. This year, I would like to offer you some reflections on the great theme of justice, beginning from the Pauline affirmation: "The justice of God has been manifested through faith in Jesus Christ" (cf. Rm 3, 21-22)...

At the heart of the wisdom of Israel, we find a profound link between faith in God who "lifts the needy from the ash heap" (Ps 113,7) and justice towards one's neighbor. The Hebrew word itself that indicates the virtue of justice, *sedakah*, expresses this well. *Sedakah*, 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 neighbor (cf. Ex 20, 12-17), especially the poor, the stranger, the orphan and the widow (cf. Dt 10, 18-19). But 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. It was not by chance that the gift to Moses of the tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai took place after the crossing of the Red Sea. Listening to the Law presupposes faith in God who first "heard the cry" of His people and "came down to deliver them out of hand of the Egyptians" (cf. Ex 3,8). God is attentive to the cry of the poor and in return asks to be listened to: He asks for justice towards the poor (cf. Sir 4,4-5, 8-9), the stranger (cf. Ex 22,20), the slave (cf. Dt 15, 12-18). In order to enter into justice, it is thus necessary to leave that illusion of self-sufficiency, the profound state of closure, which is the very origin of injustice. In other words, what is needed is an even deeper "exodus" than that accomplished by God with Moses, a liberation of the heart, which the Law on its own is powerless to realize. Does man have any hope of justice then?

The Christian Good News responds positively to man's thirst for justice, as Saint Paul affirms in the Letter to the Romans: "But now the justice of God has been manifested apart from law ... the justice of God through faith in Jesus

Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (3, 21-25). What then is the justice of Christ? Above all, it is the justice that comes from grace, where it is not man who makes amends, heals himself and others. The fact that "expiation" flows from the "blood" of Christ signifies that 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 (cf. Gal 3, 13-14). But this raises an immediate objection: what kind of justice is this where the just man dies for the guilty and the guilty receives in return the blessing due to the just one? Would this not mean that each one receives the contrary of his "due"? 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 – the need of others and God, the need of His forgiveness and His friendship. So we understand how faith is altogether different from a natural, good-feeling, obvious fact: humility is required to accept that I need Another to free me from "what is mine," to give me gratuitously "what is His." This happens especially in the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Thanks to Christ's action, we may enter into the "greatest" justice, which is that of love (cf. Rm 13, 8-10), the justice that recognizes itself in every case more a debtor than a creditor, because it has received more than could ever have been expected. Strengthened by this very experience, the Christian 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.

Dear brothers and sisters, Lent culminates in the Paschal Triduum, in which this year, too, we shall celebrate divine justice – the fullness of charity, gift, salvation. May this penitential season be for every Christian a time of authentic conversion and intense knowledge of the mystery of Christ, who came to fulfill every justice. With these sentiments, I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

Benedict XVI, P.P.

God bless each of you for a very holy Lent

Mgr. Fay