

JUSTICE BUILDS RESPECT

RESPECT

CHAPTER ONE

KEYWORDS

Respect: To take notice of; to regard with special attention; to regard as worthy of special consideration; hence, to care for; to heed.

Justice: To give self, others, and God what they are rightly due.

Dignity: The state of being worthy or honorable; true worth.

Vocation: A calling from God, to be answered with the actions of our life.

MAIN POINTS

- Sin is the deprivation of good.
- Respecting God
- The dignity of man
- How do we define our self?
- Role of the Church
- What are we called to be?
- Unity and variety
- Giving the gift of our self

Lesson Plan

The cardinal virtue justice defines our relationship with ourselves and with our neighbors in regard to how we treat our neighbors and ourselves. Living out justice to a heroic degree means giving ourselves what we are rightly due, our neighbors what they are rightly due, and God what He is rightly due. Everything that we have been given has been given to us from God. What can we possibly give God that He doesn't already have? The only thing we can give to God that He has not already given to us is our sin. Sin is the deprivation of good. God, who is the source of all life and all goodness, gives to us life, and through our sinful actions, we deprive ourselves of goodness and of God, the ultimate good. The one thing we can give Him, the very thing He is rightly due, is our choice to choose Him, to choose the good, to choose not deprivation of life, but instead choose with Him, life to the full.

If we are to recognize this gift of life given to us and to all, we must first recognize the giver of all life and with the angels exclaim "honor, power, and

might be to our God forever and ever. Amen."¹ "A son honors his father, and a servant fears his master; if then I am a father, where is the honor due to me? And if I am a master, where is the reverence due to me? So says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise his name."² God is rightly due the respect of a child toward his father and that of a servant toward his master. It is essential that respect be given to the Father and Master of all. Man is created in the image and likeness of God. We must first respect God if we are ever to learn how to respect our neighbors and ourselves, who are made in the image of God. Jesus expresses this truth in the parable of the tenants found in the 12th chapter of Mark's Gospel. A vineyard owner, having left for a trip, leased his vineyard to tenant farmers. The owner sent more than four servants, one at a time, to collect the produce of the vineyard from the tenants. The tenants beat some of the servants that were sent and killed others, showing no respect for the servants or the owner who had sent them in his place. Finally, the owner decided to send his

¹Revelations 7:12

²Malachi 1:6

beloved son, thinking, “surely they will respect my son.” The tenants showed disrespect also to the beloved son. By showing disrespect to the son, they affirmed their disrespect of the owner.

God sent to the world His prophets, priests, and kings, but this did not seem to mean a thing. The people showed disrespect for those sent by God. God then sent the Word made flesh, his one and only Son, and the disrespect continued. Jesus, the Word made flesh, who shared in our humanity so that we might share in His divinity, perfectly reveals God to us. It is of course hard to respect what we do not know, what we do not love, what we do not understand. Christ comes to us so that we might know, love, understand, and have respect for God.

Much of our focus in the modern world is on what man has done and what he will do. If we want to discover who man is and not simply what man has done or will do, we must look beyond humanity. Although modern man can acquire many things, some things cannot be acquired, but only given. Only God can give man his dignity and only God can give man his vocation. As hard as he might try, man cannot define himself, nor can he call himself to happiness. Man is defined by a standard set by God alone, and only by answering the calling of God can he satisfy the longing of his heart.

“The dignity of the human person is rooted from his creation in the image and likeness of God.”³ These are the roots by which man grasps his true identity. Just as plants draw life from their roots, man draws his life from the fact that he is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God. We see life in a tree and often give glory to the trunk, limbs, or leaves. Little notice is given to the unseen roots, which nurture the tree. It is far too easy to see life in exterior things, without recognizing the true source of life. Man can sometimes define himself by the exterior rather than the interior, which is rooted in the image of God. God is present, God is there, but rarely is He seen or acknowledged. “We ought to respect the image of God in everyone. It is there.”⁴

This dignity of the human person is given to every man without exception. By the very fact that

they were created, they are in God’s image and have been redeemed by Christ, are united to Christ, and have been given a purpose in life. Pope John Paul II said, “Man—every man without any exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ, with man—with each man without any exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it; Christ, who died, and was raised up for all, provides man—each man and every man—with the light and the strength to measure up to His supreme calling.”⁵

Christ disperses His light and gives His strength to all through the Church, His living body that He gives to the world as an instrument and source of salvation. “The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which He communicates truth and grace to all men.”⁶ In a world of so many voices, it is through the Church that each man begins to recognize the voice of God and embrace their vocation which God is calling them to. The penetrating questions within each human heart, which ask, “What am I called to be? What are you asking of me?” desperately await answers that only God can provide. In perfect imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, each person answers “yes” to this voice and is thus strengthened with the grace necessary to measure up to their call, which is ultimately the beatific vision. Each person then is called to measure up to his supreme calling, his supreme vocation. God gives him the light and strength to measure up to his supreme calling. To give justice to each person is therefore to respect each person and respect and nurture the calling given to each by God.

There is only one God, and although He is one, the diversity and beauty within His oneness has no limit. “Unity and variety. You have to be different from one another, as the saints in heaven are different, each having his own personal and very special characteristics. But also, you have to be as identical as the saints, who would not be saints if each of them had not identified himself with Christ.”⁷ In God we are united, created in the same image, and each person is a gift from God, given by God to all,

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1700

⁴ *Voices of the Saints*, Blessed Raphaela Mary

⁵ *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.3

⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 8

⁷ *The Way*, St. Josemaria Escriva

a variety of gifts, which are diverse, beautiful, and essential.

A perfect example of how variety brings unity can be found in the woman at the well found in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. In this story, we see that Jesus (a Jew) and the woman (a Samaritan) appeared to have nothing in common with one another. Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water. The woman responded, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" The woman puts up a wall of disrespect based on the differences of gender and culture. Jesus continues to tell her "if you knew the *gift of God* and Who is saying to you give me a drink you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water." Jesus shows us that to tear down the wall of differences we must one, see each person as a gift from God, and two, realize that as a gift from God, they have value and worth. The next words out of the woman's mouth are, "Sir." This title in any culture and throughout time is a sign of respect. Because the woman no longer sees Jesus as different but as a *gift from God* and with value, she begins to respect Him and addresses Him as "sir" two times. Christ continues to reveal who He is to her and shares with her things about her life. She next addresses Jesus as a prophet, a title of great respect. Later the woman comes to believe that He could be the chosen one of God, the Messiah. With great enthusiasm and confidence she shares this belief with the whole town.

Each person is a gift from God, but no person is every gift. We imitate God, the creator and giver of all life, when we give the gift of ourselves to soci-

ety. We depend on each person to share his or her gift if society is going to function. This dependence on each other which all humans share is expressed in Christ's words to St. Catherine of Siena. "I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others . . . I shall give principally charity to one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one . . . and so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another . . . I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me."⁸

We must freely give the gift of ourselves to others and work to provide the means necessary for others to recognize and nurture the gift of themselves. "Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity."⁹ We must care for each person and act with justice, giving each the respect and dignity they are due. If we selectively choose who we will love and respect, "our religion is but a false religion, and all our virtues are mere illusions and we ourselves are only hypocrites in the sight of God, if we have not that universal charity for everyone—for the good, and for the bad, for the poor and the rich, and for all those who do us harm as much as for those who do us good."¹⁰

⁸ *Voices of the Saints*, St. Catherine of Siena

⁹ CCC, 1931

¹⁰ *Voices of the Saints*, St. John Vianney

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON RESPECT

R E S P E C T

CHAPTER ONE

1. What does it mean to give someone what they are rightly due?
2. What is God rightly due? What are your parents rightly due? Your friends? Your enemies? The poor? The unborn? The imprisoned? The immigrant? The elderly, etc.
3. How is giving a person what they are rightly due a sign of respect?
4. In what ways is man made in the image of God?
5. Show a parallel in our society in which disrespect for God and the things of God has led to disrespect of man and the things of man?
6. God sends us messengers in our life. Who has God placed in your life, past and present, to bring His message to you? Did you respect the messenger? Did you respect the message they gave to you?
7. How does respect of Christ, the word made flesh, lead to respect of God?
8. Why is it so easy to respect someone for the exterior/material things in their lives?
9. What are some exterior/material things we respect about other people (people we know and people in general)?
10. Why can it be difficult to respect someone for the interior/spiritual things in their lives?
11. What are some interior/spiritual things we respect about people?
12. How can a person be united to Christ but completely unaware that they are united to Christ? Give examples.
13. How is the Church an instrument and source of salvation?
14. In the past, how have you helped someone perform or accomplish a task they were called to do?
15. In the past, how has someone helped you perform or accomplish a task you were called to do?
16. Think of a person who think has little value to society. Rethink and ask yourself how is or can this person be a gift from God? Does this thought of them as a gift from God increase your respect for the person? How so?
17. Why do we have a hard time seeing others, especially those different from us, as a gift from God?
18. Give some examples of people in your life whom you depend on because they have a gift of talent, which you do not? What is the gift they have? How does their gift benefit your life?