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2nd May
Justice versus God's Justice

Prayer

The law of God is perfect, refreshing the soul;

- let your love, O God, be our law of life and perfect guide.

Loving God, hear our Prayer.

Your forgiveness of humankind flows from generation to generation;

*- bless the nations that continue to seek vengeance,
teach us all how to forgive in the name of Jesus.*

Loving God, hear our Prayer.

Jesus, you stayed in desert places, strengthened there by God.

*- In time of pain or trouble, help us to find God in the
solitude of our hearts.*

Loving God, hear our Prayer.

You are our hope in life and in death:

*- help us to live our belief in you for the strength and
courage of all in need of your truth.*

Loving God, hear our Prayer.

Spirit of God, You call us to live in freedom and happiness;

*- give hope and peace of heart to all in prison or
bondage of any kind.*

Loving God, hear our Prayer.

1) Retributive justice

Resurgence 253 p27, Polly Higgins (UK ecological and spiritual magazine)

Much of our justice system is based on retributive justice - to penalise the perpetrator by way of fine or imprisonment. But what of the entity that has been harmed? The inadequacies are even more apparent when dealing with action by humans that results in the destruction of the wider Earth Community. Although imposing a fine on corporations who harm the environment may be a deterrent (and this in itself is questionable), it does not repair the damaged relationship. In reality fines are blunt instruments.

In recent years we have begun to see a surge in the application of restorative justice, with growing success. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in South Africa to investigate apartheid crimes adopted a restorative justice approach. In the UK, innovative and successful projects include the Glasgow Restorative Justice Service, set up in 2003 to encourage young people to take active responsibility for the effects of their behaviour not only on those harmed, but on themselves, their families and the wider community.

The justice we are practising in our society is essentially a retributive or punitive form of justice. The judicial system defines more the limits of our freedom than the ideal of truth or social equity. It does not describe what should be done, but dictates what is forbidden; and punishment applies to whoever acts against the law. Retributive justice concentrates more on wrong-doers than on victims. In principle, the judge has to arbitrate situations of conflict and to restore everyone in their rights. Yet the principle of impartiality dictates a passive attitude by the Court, with its only instrument available that of punishment as a deterrent. The “defence of the orphan and the widow” would imply an active attitude in favour of the weakest. Generally, it is not the role of justice but of social services to care for the victims. The form of justice we practise seems to be satisfied when the perpetrator has been punished. At best, the victim gets an amount of money as compensation. The form of justice we practise could therefore be defined as an approach in the negative form to the ideal of truth and social justice, i.e. based on interdictions rather than on positive guidelines.

The protection of our individual rights and property has been established in order to protect us from the violence of others, from the possible wrong-doers, but this form of negative and passive protection of our individuality soon becomes an important tool for the defence of our privileges, especially in a society where such a strong inequity characterises social relationships and when justice does not act to promote equity. Yet, everything essential for life is given freely, either by Nature (air, water, plants, etc), or by the family into which one is born (food, shelter, love, etc) and by the social system which has to care for the members of its community (education, health care, etc). These goods are so elementary to life that they should be accessible to all because they are part of the common wealth, which everybody has a right to access freely and according to their needs.

Reflection:

We call the wealth we have in common those things which nobody can own because they must remain accessible to all: air, water, food, shelter, education, public space, silence, etc.

Which are the goods essential for equity?

Prayer of intercession

Let us pray in intercession for the world, for our community, for ourselves. Please leave time between requests; we need some time to integrate the request and make it ours.

2) Restorative justice

Ga 2:15-20

15 We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,

16 yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.

(...)

19 For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God.

20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We all dream of a better world. Justice should be an active force in our society to bring about a new order: the Kingdom of God is the reality of God; it is also the reality we have to incarnate and to actualise in our life. Our human community and our connection with nature suffer at not being this perfect image of the harmony which simultaneously already is, and still has to become. We believe that the Spirit guides each one of our paths to become one body in a community which links ourselves with our source in God. Our Church should be the visible sign of this heavenly reality which takes shape here and now. Justice is thus not resolved by punishment when conflicts arise but it takes shape when the general harmony of our community is reinforced in a form of wider sharing and concern for others. There can be no real justice without inner transformation.

Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela transmitting to each other the files of Truth and Reconciliation



The law is necessary in order to define a positive and just behaviour but it is not sufficient. As Paul explains it, we can only be justified by faith. In our own transformation or in the restoration of our community, faith is the driving force. Faith is this mysterious energy which leads us and makes God's reality visible. For me, the picture of Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela expresses an image of the coming Kingdom.

Time of personal recollection:

In which specific aspect of my present life do I today invest my faith and energy in the transformation of myself and of my community? (10 mins)

Sharing

Prayer of Offering

3) The laws of nature

Mt 6:25-34

25 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

27 And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?

28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin;

29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

32 For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

Mankind has written laws which define the limits of our freedom. But these are man made laws. Our world is in fact governed by natural laws, which are the expression of the divine laws. The laws of nature are simple and easily visible if one wants to know them, because they express themselves through material effects. We have the choice to respect them or not to respect them. Whatever we do, they remain what they are. If we do not respect them, we behave in a destructive way, because they are the expression of the existing harmony in the world, which we destroy when we go against it, creating chaos and suffering:

The laws of nature are made of cycles. Waste does not exist because it becomes the resource for the next step of the cycle. Waste is a concept we have invented; we call waste those things we have produced and don't know what to do with. Nature is generous and gives everything free when we are capable to adapt to its rhythms and ways.

Nature is not God but it is one of the main and most visible expressions of his generosity and creativity. We have therefore the opportunity to learn how to adapt to the existing harmony. In fact we have to recognise that any activity which does not fit into natural cycles is destructive and deprives the poorest and the weakest among us of their basis for survival. The laws of nature are our teacher to practice righteousness and to prepare for the Kingdom of God

Time of personal reflection:

How can the text from the Gospel of St. Matthew inspire us to discover these mysterious laws of the divine harmony and live more in accordance with them ?

Sharing

Prayer of Thanksgiving for God's Creation and asking Forgiveness.

4) Judgement and righteousness

Jn 3:14-21

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up,

15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

18 He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

19 And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

Rev 1:12-16

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,

13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast;

14 his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire,

15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters;

16 in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Heb 4:12

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

1 Jn 4:12-19

12 No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit.

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world.

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

16 So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

17 In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgement, because as he is so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.

19 We love, because he first loved us.

The Greek word for judgement means: to sort, to separate. Judging means therefore sorting and separating, i.e. discerning, seeing the differences.

God is not a punishing father. He wants us to discover life in its essence and therefore to become free of our false representations of it. The laws of nature, because they are more visible and palpable, guide us on this path of discovery to what Truth is. Truth and God's reality remain mysteries for us because we live in ignorance and illusion and we can access them only through grace. The judgement is not the sentence for our punishment, but it is the opening to the other reality of the Kingdom; it is the way of our enlightenment in the recognition of the true nature of life. It is the discovery of our true vocation. It is why it is important to sort out, to separate what is true and permanent from what is only an illusion. The sword which comes out of the mouth of the Christ is nothing else but these powerful means to distinguish the true nature of life. Through judgement Christ has condemned sin, because it is the false and illusory way for life. God's righteousness is not a crushing power, it is a liberating power. He offers us life despite our ignorance and wrong-doing, despite our illusions and avoidance of his love. God is a giver; he draws the believer into the sphere of his power which gives life.

We access deeper righteousness:

- on one hand by practising justice, i.e. in recognition and adoration of God as the source of our life,
- and on the other hand by receiving it, because righteousness is a gift by grace.

We can describe some successive steps towards righteousness:

I would invite you to listen to each one and find how each might correspond to something concrete in your life:

- the recognition of the laws of the Kingdom of God invites us to practise a righteous way of life in gratitude;
- the practice of judgement (i.e. sorting and discernment) helps us to recognise the true nature of life as flowing out of God's heart, in the revelation of His infinite love;
- the adoration of God as the source of our true nature, because we recognise that He is our unique guide and maker;
- our faith in His power and in our transformation into what we are meant to be,
- our justification (i.e. we are made righteous by God) by His grace as a pure gift of his love,
- our salvation and liberation which transforms us and gives us access to our true life in God.

Then let's have a time of adoration in silence where we can focus on the grace of God as our way to salvation.

Time of personal recollection:

I would invite you to listen to each one of these steps and find how each might correspond to something concrete in your life:

Then let's have a time of adoration in silence where we can focus on the grace of God as our way to salvation.

Sharing

Prayer

*O Holy God, you continue to bless us with your gifts of creation.
May we give thanks to you for your kindness to your people and
take delight in the gifts we share to bring about the fullness of
your life in this our world. We pray this of you, Most Blessed Trinity,
living in us and among us through all generations.
Amen.*