

**Pastoral Letter
of H.L. Mons. Mario Grech
Bishop of Gozo**



**On the occasion of the Feast of
The Assumption of Mary into Heaven**

2009

God is just with his chosen ones

Dear Beloved,

To help us understand how dependent on God we are, Jesus likened himself to bread. For mankind, bread means life. In the part of the Gospel that has just been read to us, Jesus states: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven”,¹ and during his lifetime he often relieved people’s hunger. One has to add that in our daily experience bread does not fall from the sky onto our dining table, but one has to work for it! And very often one has to knead the bread with his own toil and sweat! As it is only just that Man has something to eat, in the same way he must earn his bread by just means. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. At times the bread is kneaded by arms soiled by unjust actions.

With a heavy heart I note that there are various people complaining that they feel victimised by some injustice in the broad sense of the word. This also means that there are among us those who are responsible for these actions that wound mankind.

Unjust actions

Pope Benedict XVI is correct when he states that modern atheism – where man is shaping his life and his social life as if God does not exist – has led to greater forms of cruelty and injustice.² A society that considers God as superfluous or an obstacle, is convinced that it can create its own version of justice according to its inclination, its views and its interests. The future of this kind of society is indeed uncertain because, as the philosopher Pascal says, “by itself mankind is incapable of knowing what justice is”.³

This is confirmed by our own current experience of becoming deaf to God! In fact, the band of injustices is continually widening:

- When some person or group tries to soil the name or the memory of a person by spreading rumours with the aim of weakening his credibility or hampering his work.
- We have families that are no longer families because of the unjust way family wealth has been distributed; siblings that do not talk with each other because of abuses connected with inheritance; families who, through interference by third parties and legal manipulations, found themselves robbed of the family patrimony; families that are victims of usury.
- As some families that were robbed of their material wealth, so other families have been deprived of a higher form of wealth: faithfulness in marriage. Marriage infidelity happens when a man desires a married woman or a woman desires a married man; that deprives the other party and the children in a marriage of the person that is rightfully theirs. This, too, is an injustice against the very institution of marriage and the family.
- On a social level, I would mention the financial crisis that has hit the world. If the financial institutions had followed just criteria and administered correctly the wealth that many people trusted them with, a lot of new social poverty would have been avoided.

Jesus has good reason to tell us to seek first the Kingdom and justice of God, and the Father would give us all we need to eat, drink, dress and even more.⁴ To cleanse the society of his time from all injustice, Jesus always sought to do his Father’s will. On his example, if we do God’s will, we can

¹ Jh 6,51.

² Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 42.

³ Blaise Pascal, *Pensieri*, n.300.

⁴ Cfr Mt 6,32-33.

build a beautiful city where true justice flourishes. Our action will be just if it is in accordance with the will of God. Justice is a gift from God that involves a commitment from us humans. Every form of injustice is a sin.

Love and justice

Jesus pricks our conscience when he tells us: “ If your just life is not better than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of Heaven”.⁵ These words reveal that there are two levels of justice: the natural and the supernatural, which is called “*caritas*”. Love is a higher justice. Although it is higher than justice, love concomitantly presupposes justice. How could one give to others from what is his, if one is not prepared to give to another what he deserves by right?! To love, one has to be just. There is no love where justice is not respected. Justice opens the first route for one to learn to love. Perhaps that is why we lack Christian Charity – because talk about justice bothers us!

Commutative justice

In our mutual relationships we are supposed to practise commutative justice – that which governs relations between individuals. For instance, when one buys an object or a service, one pays its price. We often hear about the price index and it hardly occurs to us that many of us, through our just or unjust actions, play a part in determining the level of this index. All of us, Government and people, need to contribute to ensure that abusive behaviour in the matter of pricing is reduced as much as possible. It is right, therefore, to ask: how just are the prices being set, particularly those of objects essential for life? How just is the cost of services we provide? How free of dishonesty is the product or service we are paid for? How much do we honour the contracts we make? How honest are we in the preparation of legal documents? In the same way that just remuneration is important, one must not be careless or abusively absent from work.

Distributive Justice

Those who serve the public as administrators, either at national or local level, apply distributive justice – that which regulates relationships between a society and the individuals who form part of it. It is their responsibility to see how the good things and the burdens are distributed among citizens proportionately according to the needs and the skills of each person. Distributing wealth and burdens equally for everyone would not be a just choice. It would not be justice if, in the case of social services, the State helps everyone in exactly the same way, or if the citizens expect the State to support everybody using the same weighting across the board. The consequence of that would be that those who have a genuine need would not be helped to the extent they deserve!

Today we hear a lot about the direct financial assistance that the European Union gives to its member nations, including Malta. There is no doubt that these financial funds are providential because, with them, the country can actuate useful projects for sound and sustainable development in the general interest of our people. It remains the responsibility of the Government and of the people themselves to ensure that everyone contributes so that these funds are put to the best use to advance the interest of our people.

Legal justice

Those in authority have the power to make just laws for the common good. The citizen has the duty to abide by these laws. In the legal justice structure there are laws about the collection of taxes, like

⁵ Mt 5,20.

income tax, succession duty, and VAT. Whoever tries to evade these laws or to associate with those who want to avoid them is acting against justice.

If the State has a right and duty to collect funds, so the citizen has a right to monitor how public funds are being spent. Good administration of public funds is a blessing; but bad administration can lead to big financial burdens which have to be borne by future generations. This is a very serious matter, more so now that the need is being felt for us to strive more for the culture of personal accountability of those responsible to take root.

Social Justice

In what is called social justice, the members of society who reap the fruit remember those who do not have enough means to live with dignity. “God wants that ... those that have some particular ‘talent’ give from what they have to those who need it. Differences attract and sometimes oblige people to show a big heart and much goodness that bring them to the point of sharing with others what they have”.⁶ The poor and lowly are never a burden for society, but are a resource, even from the economic aspect.⁷ Since the *principle of gratuitousness*, which implies the giving and self-giving in a spirit of fraternity, is also useful for economic activity,⁸ in a society based on profit it is necessary that voluntary associations are better appreciated.

On the other hand, even the abusive use of social services is an injustice. There are those who cheat the authority to qualify for social assistance. A typical case is when one takes unemployment benefit when, in fact, one is working for gain.

Retributive Justice

Retributive justice obligates those who are responsible for some unjust action to return or restore what was stolen or damaged. According to human law the duty to return or repair may be prescribed; but according to God’s law, this sin will not be forgiven before there is restitution. If one steals someone’s reputation, one has the duty to rehabilitate that reputation; if someone breaks up a family, he is in duty bound to try to restore harmony; if one steals, one should return what was stolen.

Unjust social structures

In society, there may be private or public structures that, without any scruple, work with unjust methods. In these “structures of sin”⁹ which generate all kinds of injustice, there are persons who abuse the system without any ethical or moral principle. In as much as the citizen has the duty to be just in his activity, he also has the duty to control these structures, and if they are unjust structures, to use the means at his disposal to change them.

God will do justice

However great the injustice, the Christian should be convinced that God will do justice with his chosen ones.¹⁰ As the Father did justice with his Son and raised him from the tomb after an unjust death, so he will do with us. In addition, God helps those who wish to free themselves of unjust

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.1937.

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 35.

⁸ Cfr. *Caritas in veritate*, 36.

⁹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 36.

¹⁰ Cfr. Lk 18,7.

attitudes. The desire there is in man to live in justice is a motive for him to believe in eternity,¹¹ where all that had been will disappear, there will not be any more suffering and God will wipe every tear from our eyes.¹² This belief is strengthened by this solemnity we are about to celebrate of the Assumption into Heaven of the Virgin Mary.

With the intercession of Mary, *Speculum Iustitiae (Mirror of Justice)*, I pray for God's blessing on you.

Given from the Bishop's Curia in Victoria, Gozo, today, Thursday 6th August, Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord.

Mgr Saviour Debrincat
Chancellor

+ Mario Grech
Bishop of Gozo

¹¹ *Spe salvi*, 42.

¹² Cfr. Rev 21,4.