



Saint Thomas More
1478 – 1535

Window: Holy Cross Diocesan Center, La Crosse, WI.

In Brief:

ON CHRISTIAN JUSTICE

“O Jesus, You lived in a world filled with injustice, and You were the victim of the most frightful injustice ever committed. Yet, You called people to be just and merciful. You always taught Your disciples to put their duties to God first, but You never failed to recognize their duties to men. Often You did not make sharp distinctions between charity and justice, seeking always to give as much as You could from Your divine love. In our lives we must first seek to be just and then to be loving. Help us O Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, to follow in Your righteous way, the way of charity and justice, always placing first Your strongest and most powerful teaching that we must love both justly and generously. Amen.”

-The Virtue Driven Life

Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R.

Sacred Scripture:

“If a man is just and does what is lawful and right – if he does not oppress anyone..., commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked..., is careful to observe My ordinances, he shall surely live, says the Lord God.”
Ezekiel 15:5-9

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH

JUSTICE

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“*Justice* is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the ‘virtue of religion.’ Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. ‘You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor’” (CCC 1807).

What is the virtue of justice?

Justice is the acquired habit of being fair and righteous in all circumstances.

- The *natural* virtue of justice calls us to be fair and honest in our relationships with God and others.
- The natural virtue of religion is part of the virtue of justice and directs us to honor and worship God. The virtue of religion requires us to show reverence, love, obedience, and gratitude to our Maker.
- The *supernatural* virtue of justice, through cooperating with the grace of God, makes us responsible for following the teachings of Christ and His Church in all aspects of life. Christian justice causes us to give to God what is due Him and, within that understanding, to give others what is due them as children of God. The foundation of the Ten Commandments is living justice toward God and neighbor.
- The virtue of justice does not stand alone, “it is intertwined with the virtues of sincerity, gratitude, obedience, piety, friendship, simplicity, honesty, and religion.”

Why do we need the virtue of justice?

- The virtue of justice draws us to give God reverence, worship, love.
- In justice, we seek what is good and fair and avoid what is evil.
- Justice helps us to give others what is their due, so that they can fulfill their responsibilities and exercise their rights as persons in their situation in life. We also try to see that others do the same.
- In justice, each person is to be treated with dignity.
- Justice is required to repair any harm done to a neighbor.
- Justice makes for peace and mutual trust and confidence among men in that it respects the rights of all and restrains deceit and fraud.
- We have a responsibility to improve the conditions for individuals to obtain their due (Social Justice).
- Due to the fact that everything that we have is a gift from God, we are temporary stewards of these gifts. In justice, we must make good use of these gifts in serving others. Therefore, on the Day of Judgment, we will be asked how we used the gifts that we received.

“Whenever men or women heed the call of truth, their conscience then guides their actions reliably towards good. Precisely because of the witness which he bore, even at the price of his life, to the primacy of truth over power, Saint Thomas More is venerated as an imperishable example of moral integrity.”

APOSTOLIC LETTER
ISSUED MOTU PROPRIO
PROCLAIMING
SAINT THOMAS MORE
PATRON OF STATESMEN
AND POLITICIANS

HIS HOLINESS
JOHN PAUL II
31 October 2000



Justice Saint Thomas More



Painting: Mary, Mother of the Church Parish, La Crosse, WI.

FAST FACTS

Also Known As:

Patron of lawyers
Patron of politicians
Patron of statesmen
Patron of stepparents
Patron of civil servants
Patron of court clerks
Patron of difficult marriages
Patron of widowers

Feast Day:

June 22

His Life

- Thomas More was born in London on February 7, 1478 to John More, a lawyer and judge and Agnes Granger.
- At age 12, Thomas became a page to the Archbishop of Canterbury.
- The Archbishop sent Thomas to study at Oxford University when Thomas turned 14.
- Thomas distinguished himself as a scholar, lawyer, and judge.
- He had four children by his first wife who died young and then he helped raise the 3 children of his second wife. He provided a happy home and educated all his children, even his daughters, in a time when women were generally not educated.
- At age 26, Thomas was elected to the English Parliament. He served for 31 years in positions that included Ambassador to Flanders, Speaker of the House of Commons and Lord Chancellor of England. He was knighted in 1521.
- Thomas More corresponded with all the great minds of Europe. One of his best friends was Erasmus, an author and scholar.
- Thomas More’s best known work is *Utopia*, a book that describes an ideal society.
- Thomas was a friend to King Henry VIII. However, Henry did several things that Thomas could not ignore in good conscience. Henry asked the Pope for an annulment from his wife, Queen Catherine, to marry Anne Boleyn. When the annulment did not come from the Pope, Henry separated from the Church in Rome and named himself ‘Protector and Supreme Head of the Church of England.’ Then he married Anne Boleyn. King Henry also forbade the Bishops in England to send money to Rome. The King required the clergy to swear an oath acknowledging him as head of the Church of England. Because Thomas More refused to take the oath, even under pressure from his family and friends, he was reduced to poverty with no income, imprisoned and later martyred because he would not compromise his values nor forsake the truth to save his life.

How is Saint Thomas More a model of justice?

- Thomas More disliked luxury and ostentation. Rather, he desired to share his wealth in watching out for the welfare of the poor.
- In Parliament, Thomas voted with concern for the underprivileged to decrease the appropriation for King Henry VII. Although the poor were pleased with his vote, the King imprisoned Thomas’s father until Thomas paid a fine and withdrew from public life.
- To exercise his duty as a citizen, Thomas became active in politics again. He was knighted, became Speaker of the House of Commons and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.
- Thomas More resigned his position as Chancellor of England to avoid conflict with King Henry VIII. Thomas could not compromise his faithfulness to God and the Catholic Church.
- Thomas refused to swear to King Henry VIII’s Act of Succession establishing the Church of England and the Oath of Supremacy making the King the head of that church.
- He was beheaded for “treason.” His last words were, “The King’s good servant, but God’s first.”

Practices to foster the growth of the virtue of justice

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [justice], for they shall be satisfied.”
(Matthew 5:6).*

- **Prayer to Saint Thomas Moore:**

St. Thomas More, counselor of law and statesman of integrity, merry martyr and most human of saints: Pray that my family may find in me what yours found in you: justice towards all, friendship and courage, cheerfulness and charity, diligence in duties, counsel in adversity, patience in pain—their good servant, and God's first. Amen.

- As a class, read about a person in the Bible and together discuss how this person models the virtue of justice. Example: Tobit in the Book of Tobit
- Read a book about a saint and report to the class how this person lived by charity. Examples: St. John Fisher, Blessed Miguel Pro
- Justice sometimes requires that we speak out. Pray about what God wants you to speak out for that is just in your situation or society as well as speak out against what is unjust in your situation or in society.
- Justice always requires that we show reverence toward God, to each person He has created and His works. How can you show more reverence to God, His children, and His works?
- The practice of justice is a necessary virtue to maintain peace and joy between friends, families, communities and countries. Give an example when justice is not practiced in each of these areas.
- Read one of the Scripture passages and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you:
Isaiah 1:16-23 Proverbs 21:2-15 Sirach 35:1-12
- The Apostle, St. James the Less is also known as St. James the Just. Read his epistle, *James*, Chapters 1 – 5 and discuss the principles given to live justice toward others.
- Pray, using *Lectio Divina*, a Scripture passage which focuses on the virtue of justice.
The Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25-37*) The Ten Lepers (*Luke 17:11-19*) Feeding 5000 (*John 6:1-15*)
- How have you worked for justice toward God, those you know and love, and to the poor and the needy?
- Memorize a Scripture verse that speaks of justice:
Deuteronomy 16:20 Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land the Lord your God gives you.
Psalm 98:9 The Lord, for He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.
Isaiah 56:1 Thus says the Lord: Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon My salvation will come, and My deliverance be revealed.
Proverbs 31:9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor and needy.
Micah 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

- “The virtue of justice is only acquired when we live justly in all our actions.” We must will to act justly and then follow this with just actions in order to develop this virtue. However, the virtue of justice does not stand alone, “it is intertwined with the virtues of simplicity, sincerity, gratitude, obedience, piety, friendship, religion, and honesty. Unless these virtues are lived in conjunction with justice, justice cannot operate”

(Taken from *Raise Happy Children Teach Them Virtues!*, Mary Ann Budnick, p. 272).

Discuss an example of each.

The virtue of simplicity impacts justice when your actions correspond to your motives.

The virtue of sincerity is linked to justice when you apologize for hurting another or make reparation for hurting another or damaging someone’s possessions.

Justice motivated by the virtue of gratitude is to be expressed when someone shows kindness in the form of some work, help or other action. Justice demands that you show your appreciation with spoken words of thanks and a thank you note. Christ calls us to serve others, not just to expect people to spend their lives serving our wants and needs. Justice demands that you do not “use” others then ignore them until you need their services again.

Justice demands obedience to all lawful authority – the laws of God, the directives and just counsel of parents, and civil laws that do not contradict the laws of God.

Justice allied to the virtue of piety moves you to fulfill your duties towards your parents and responsibilities as citizens toward your country: as an upright citizen, voting responsibly by choosing the most moral candidates, being patriotic, and being involved (*Tobit 4:1-20*)

Justice associated with the virtue of friendship invites you to live loyalty toward your friends by refraining from gossiping about them behind their back or criticizing them to others. Justice also compels you to be available to help them, console them, and to spend time with them while challenging them spiritually to grow holy.

Justice linked with the virtue of religion obliges you to give thanks, honor and glory to God through daily prayers, Sunday Mass, the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the ongoing study of the Catholic Faith.

Justice is related to honesty in dealing with others, in safeguarding the possessions, property, and name of another. Paying one’s just debts is part of justice but is also the 7th Commandment.

The Perfect Justice of God

What often happens in the economic order, happened in the moral order; man contracted a bigger debt than he could pay. A sin against Divine Love is greater than man alone can repair. But if God undertook to forgive the debt through mercy, justice would have been unrequited. God of course could pay the debt of man’s sin, but He could not in justice do it apart from man.

A judge will not permit a stranger to walk off the street into a courtroom and take the death sentence of a murderer. In like manner, God could not pay our debt unless He became in some way involved in it.

It was not that our sins were transferred to Him that we might be guiltless, but that by accepting allegiance with our human nature He willed to be visited upon Him the conditions which our sins deserved.

Thus did He will that in Him our suffering might be transmuted from penalty into expiation, and be the beginning of a new life in Him.

The Seven Virtues, Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen,
Garden City Books, pages 80, 81, 82

Additional Resources on the virtue of justice

Pre-school through Third Grade

- *Picture Book of Saints*, Saint Joseph Edition. Rev. Lawrence G. Lovasik, S.V.D., Catholic Book Publishing Company.
- *The Children Book of Saints*, Louis Savory (one page with picture).

Fourth Grade through Eighth Grade

- *Saints for Young Readers for Every Day, Volume 1*, Wallace, Susan Helen, F.S.P., Pauline Books and Media
- *Best-Loved Saints*, Lovasik, Fr. Lawrence G. S.V.D., Catholic Book Publishing Corp.
- *Saint of the Day, Lives, Lessons, Feasts*, Foley, Leonard, O.F.M., St. Anthony Messenger Press.
- *St. Thomas More of London*, Ince, Elizabeth M., Ignatius Press (164 pages).
- *A Man for All Seasons*, Video, 150 min., Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
- *A Man for All Seasons*, DVD with Paul Scofield, Robert Shaw, Orson Welles, 120 min. Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization

Ninth Grade through Twelfth Grade

- *St. Thomas More of London*, Ince, Elizabeth M., Ignatius Press (164 pages).
- *The Life of St. Thomas More*, by his son-in-law William Roper, The Neuman Press, Aquinas and More Catholic Goods, www.aquinasandmore.com, 866-428-2820 (130 pages).
- *Thomas More: A Portrait of Courage*, edited by Gerard B. Wegemer, Scepter Press, The Catholic Company, 866-522-8465 (307 pages).
- *The Sadness of Christ and final prayers and instructions* by Thomas More, edited by Gerard Wegemer and Clarence Miller, Scepter Press, (184 pages).
- *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, St. Thomas More, edited by Mary Gottschalk (320 pages).
- *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More, (128 pages).
- *A Man for All Seasons*, Video, 150 min., Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
- *A Man for All Seasons*, DVD with Paul Scofield, Robert Shaw, Orson Welles, 120 min. Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (see further references in the Index)
 - Acting according to justice, paragraph 1778
 - Actions incompatible with justice, paragraph 1916
 - Duties of justice, paragraphs 1459, 2446-2447, 2487
 - Seeking justice, paragraph 2820

Resources for Teachers and Parents

- *The Virtue Driven Life*, Groeschel, Father Benedict J, C.F.R., Our Sunday Visitor
- *Raise Happy Children Teach Them Virtue*, Budnick, Mary Ann, R.B. Media, Inc.
- *Character Building: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*, Isaacs, David, Four Courts Press.
- *The Heart of Virtue*, DeMarco, Donald, Ignatius Press.
- *The Many Faces of Virtue*, DeMarco, Donald, Emmaus Road Publishing.
- *Back to Virtue*, Kreeft, Peter, Ignatius Press.

“Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Matthew 5:10