



# Charity or Justice

By Fanny Pedraza

It's not fair!" We often hear children say this when someone else gets a bigger slice of cake or cuts in front of them while waiting in line.

They consider those who allow these actions to have favorites — to be partial. Although in our infancy we may have screamed "mine!" when we wanted to assert possession of a toy or affection, we soon learn the notion of justice, the expectation that everyone has rights, and that they are to be respected.

Where does this notion come from?

"Our Father, who art in Heaven..." we are taught to pray. This prayer constantly reminds us of our common origin and dignity as God's children; it teaches us to acknowledge that no matter who we are, what we have or where we live or how we look, we all share a common origin, earthly journey and final destination; and that God loves us all the same.

We are also taught to treat others as we want to be treated. This loving advice, echo of the Golden Rule, gradually leads us to awareness of others and our own worth before God; it moves us to act justly; it helps us to grow with a sense of fairness, free of prejudice, unjust favoritism and partiality.

Another teaching we receive in our formation years is to be aware of other people's material and spiritual needs and to respond to them. At times we feel generously blessed and we choose to be charitable, to sacrifice in their benefit. We lose sight of the fact that what we own beyond our needs does not belong to us.

I often remember one of my teachers saying that the shoes that I kept in my closet and did not use did not belong to me, but to the barefooted; that if do not

share the goods I possess with those in need, I steal from them.

Prayers, teachings and advice from parents and teachers are the source of our notion of justice. Ever since I registered them in my heart and in my mind, I hear God's call to share with the needy not only what I have in excess in my closet, in my pantry and in my bank, but also my spiritual riches. And I am well aware that when I respond to His call I am doing justice, not charity.

## For your personal reflection

As you read, reflect and pray on the following, ask God for help to discern the criteria for judgment and guidelines for action: Paragraphs 2443-2449 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; Matthew 25:35-42; John 13:34; Micah 6:8; Proverbs 21:3.

- For what reasons do you (or do you not) feel compelled to share your material and spiritual riches with others in need?
- Does Jesus' New Commandment (John 13:34) call you to practice justice or to do charity? Why?

## To do as a family

Locate an organization that may be asking donations for specific needs. What does God call you to do?

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