

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Easier Said than Done"



We all want justice. We all want justice for ourselves. We all want justice for those we know and love. We all want justice (hopefully) for all people.

What does it mean to be just? The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines it as “honorable and fair in one’s dealings and actions; consistent with what is morally right; righteous; suitable or proper; fitting; to conform with moral righteousness in action or attitude.”

God is the ultimate model and source of all justice. Perhaps no where else do we see this proclaimed so clearly in Scripture as we do in the Book of Psalms. Psalm 7: 6: “Awake, my God, decree justice.” Psalm 9:8: “God will govern the people with justice.” Psalm 9: 16: “The Lord is known by his justice.” Psalm 33:5: “The Lord loves righteousness and justice.” Psalm 89: 14: “Justice is the foundation of your throne.” Psalm 99: 4: “The King is mighty and loves justice.” Psalm 101:1: “I will sing of your love and justice.”

Of course, it is a lot easier to simply talk about our desire—even our demand—for justice than it is to make it real in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Francis de Sales knew of the difficulties of making justice real when he wrote of the virtue of *zeal* in his Treatise on the Love of God. In this selection, he identified three means or levels of promoting and doing what is just.

The *first method* is, not surprisingly, the most popular: we can promote justice by pointing out other’s failure to do so. This is obviously the easiest because while it demands that we recognize the injustices of others it does not require us to do the same of ourselves. Consumed with a “do as I say, not as I do” mentality we run the risk of being blind in our own concerns as it relates to promoting justice. This method, believed De Sales, is the least effective way to promote justice.

The *second way* to promote justice is to be less concerned about what others are doing (or not doing) and to demonstrate our passion “by doing acts of great virtue in order to give good example by suggesting remedies for evil, encouraging others to apply them and doing the good opposed to the evil that we wish to eradicate.” (TLG, Book Ten, Chapter 16) Insofar as this requires us to not only talk the talk but walk the walk, Francis claimed that “few

of us are anxious to do it.”

The *third*—the most excellent, and the most challenging—*level or method* of promoting justice “consists in suffering and enduring many things in order to prevent or avert evil. Almost no one wants to exercise this kind of passion” for proclaiming—and accomplishing—all that is just.

This most demanding—but most powerful—means of working for justice requires that we be willing to risk everything for what is righteous and just...sometimes, even life itself.

Nowhere do we see this risking for what is righteous more clearly than in the person of Jesus himself. Nowhere do we see the passion—and price—for pursuing what is just more powerfully than on the cross of Calvary. St. Francis de Sales wrote: “Our Lord’s passion appeared principally in his death on the cross to destroy death and the sins of humanity.” To imitate this method “is a perfection of courage and an unbelievable fervor of spirit.”

The merit of one’s passion for justice is measured by the willingness to do—and suffer for—what is right. How does my passion measure up?