

About Justice: A Meditation

FATHER DALMAZIO MONGILLO

"Christianity is, above all, the enjoyment of a person." These are the words that came forth from the lips of Father Dalmazio Mongillo during our first meeting, words that revealed to me immediately the spiritual treasures and depth of insight that were concealed beneath his white Dominican habit. The long friendship we have had since that first meeting has brought many riches to me personally and also to our Catechesis, especially in relation to our work in moral formation, and in helping us understand the significance of the Catechesis being "always a celebration."

Father Mongillo is a professor of theology at the Angelicum, the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome, and in Toronto. He also gives courses and leads countless retreats and seminars in far eastern Asia, the Middle East, and in North, Central and South America.

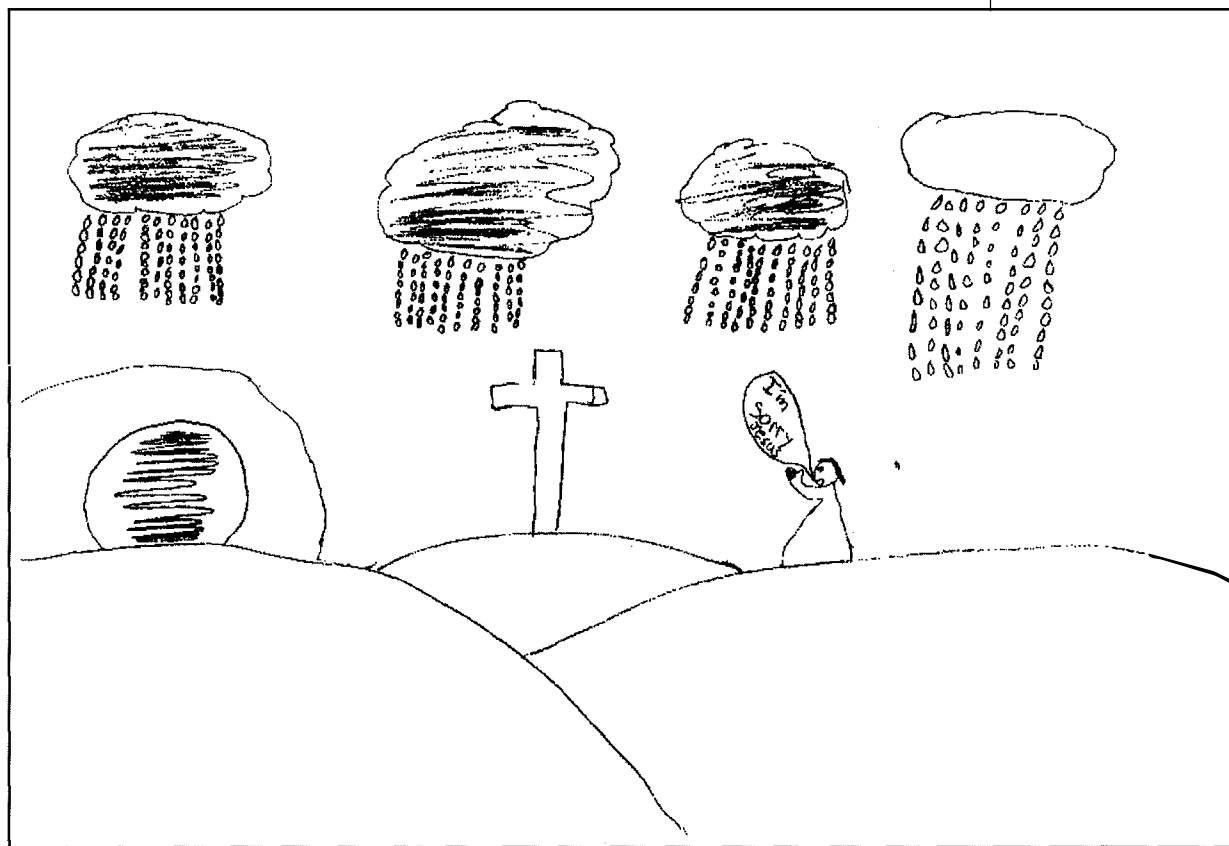
— Sofia Cavalletti

Rome, October 26, 1996

Let us read from the letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 4:1–7 and 11–16).

I suggested this text because it identifies the truths I would like to elaborate in this meditation on justice. Justice is universal in its aims, cultural in its institutions, and personal in its realizations. It is actualized according to the customs of peoples and nations, so that no one person does everything, but each person does his or her share for the good of every person.

The letter to the Ephesians deals with the universal plan that guides everything to its fulfillment, thus



Stacey, age 9
Church of Our Saviour
Chicago, Illinois

About Justice

allotting tasks in an orderly and organic way, rather than a casual one. It is the most suitable text for our meditation as we focus on our identity as individuals who live in communities that together constitute the family of peoples.

The Plurality of Human Individuals and Cultures

Let us imagine what we are speaking about. Let us imagine a world map and find on it the place we live. We are part of the world. Although we live in a determined point in space, in a particular moment of time, we are immersed in this world that is made of nonhuman realities, such as land, seas, mountains and sky; it is also composed of peoples and individuals. It is a world supported by structures that are different politically, juridically, economically and relationally, which are at times in conflict. This world did not begin with us; the earth in which we live began billions of years ago, and we assume it will not end with us.

On a synchronized and diachronized level, we perceive the ties of reciprocal assistance, of belonging, of continuity and succession. We belong to peoples who together constitute humankind.

More than ever today, we are aware that, when it comes to distances, the smallest distances are causes of concern, while the greatest seem to be almost conquered. Jet aircraft make it possible to travel around the world in a few hours, yet it is sometimes disastrous to travel a few hundred meters in our cities.

This awareness, this reawakening to interdependency and belonging is very important. So many hotbeds of war keep us apart on this small planet; yet there

is so much longing for peace, such a great desire to overcome fundamental differences in belief, such a quest for reciprocal assistance, such a large movement of peoples. Great migrations have been going on for centuries. In this reality we must "adjust" ourselves and find our place, so that our relations with the whole might be harmonious. This alone would be quite important.

There is another detail. This world of which we are a part did not come into existence by itself. According to our creed, the world was created, brought into existence by God, who is also the origin of each individual. Each of the inhabitants of this world is compelled by the Spirit to find his or her fulfillment in God. Thus, while being different from seas, oceans, mountains, plants and animals, the individuals who populate the earth are citizens of this world, yet each of them is a child of God.

The reciprocal assistance among human beings, the relationship between humankind and the cosmos, the connection that every individual and all of us have with the One who is the Creator of all and of each person, God who calls each person by name, all this is the foundation of our meditation. This meditation diverts us from the personal delusion that leads us to believe that the world is "me," as if there were no one else other than myself, as if I were the one carrying the world on my shoulders. This meditation also diverts us from the collective follies that make an individual feel part of a maximized whole, according to which the whole must live and individuals have no legitimate claims to personal expectations.

However, an individualism that is centralizing, dictatorial, fundamentalist, terrorist or manipulating in reality renders individual persons useless within the cosmos.

In contrast, the line of thought we are following detracts nothing from the universe or cosmos, nor from the human beings inhabiting the cosmos, nor from the individuals who make up humankind; rather, it reminds them of their relationship with God. In light of this, we can consider the traditional definition of justice, which is a synthesis of the Greek, Jewish and Roman traditions, and of the ideals of the Western world. Yet, it is much more than this. It states, "Justice is the will to distribute to each his or her portion." This will is constant, permanent and always new, rather than emotional or fragmented, allotting to each that person's own. This concept is summarized in the famous saying, *unicuique suum*, meaning "to each his or her own." This distribution is not casual and not the result of a reciprocal agreement, but is brought about by will.

Justice involves acknowledging, comprehending, discerning, deciding and acting so that each person has what properly belongs to that person, and all people have everything they need. This means that every human group is recognized, that every ocean and land are given the respect due to them, that every mountain is appropriately protected, that every creature in the animal kingdom is given the proper attention, and that individuals receive what properly belongs to them.

This *unicuique suum* cannot be determined once and for all. Reality is

About Justice

alive; seas are populated with fish, the land is covered with plants subject to the seasons, winter is different from summer. Humankind is really on a journey, in the process of evolving. What was relevant to human beings one hundred years ago is no longer important today; the aspirations of people have changed. Thus, this *unicuique suum* always belongs to everyone but is never the same.

The will to exercise justice must not only be constant and perennial, it must overcome fragmentation among human beings and the lowest forms of volition. Because a people's history is not limited to the duration of the life of any individual, it must also overcome time. History is not ready-made; it evolves, it is being realized. Thus, we cannot examine today with the measuring stick of yesterday. In the past people were seeking their own in a specific way; today, their expectations and awarenesses differ. New possibilities have emerged.

However, this is not a case of interpreting history as if nothing were constant. Individuals are always themselves, creation is always occurring, the human world is continually renewing itself, never static. Because of this, justice is never completed but is always on the verge of being realized. We have never finished acknowledging the *unicuique suum* of each person's reality.

The Variety of Needs and Distribution of Tasks

This initial truth might arouse in us a feeling of anxiety. How can the whole world be my concern? How can I take care of everybody? Even when my concern

is confined to my city, my family, my work? Humankind is one, not made of numeric quantities but of relationships. We are united because we are interdependent, because we offer one another reciprocal assistance, because we are converging. We communicate on the same planet. This truth flows into the distribution of tasks. Only distinct realities can be linked, and if they can be linked, they are one.

The peoples of the world—north, south, east and west—are quite distinct. The people within a continent are different, yet they want to converge, and thus they invent languages with which to communicate, and commerce. This is done in such a way that human difference is not an obstacle to unification, and human separateness does not cause conflict in creation or disrupt creation's relationship to the Mystery. Each facet of humankind has its own way to ensure unity, to face multiculturalism and diversity, all in order to encourage communication. This leads to the understanding that no one person must do everything, but that every person must do what belongs to him or her, while being conscious that the sum of the many parts makes a whole.

This is the crux of distribution. While the Romans used to say, "Divide and conquer," we proclaim, "Share and harmonize." Sharing and participating must increase, while division and separation must pass away.

History is characterized by the tension that exists between distribution and communication within the same reality. Abraham and Lot divided the land (Genesis 13:5ff); individuals and peoples

at other times in history began a process of participation and communication. Distinctness and communication have become two great tendencies, two great ambitions, which add a dynamic to the history of humanity. Some have tried to retake what they left behind; others tried to defend themselves from these imposed aggregations, while still others attempted to live together despite their differences. There have been and continue to be wars and usurpations, yet the process of communication, of coming to an agreement, of reaching an understanding in order to live together, continues, although in distinct and diverse forms. The importance of this link between distribution and convergence is experienced at all levels: the couple, the family, the community.

The Task of the Law

The third determining factor in this journey of "adjusting," of diversity within unity, of safeguarding a complex unity, is the one that prevents the process from taking place by chance. It seeks to prevent this process from being realized through usurpation or war and encourages its development through reasoning and justice. This path has been traveled from the beginning of human civilization, from fourth- and fifth-century BCE Greece to the Jewish tradition. The root of order was called "law." God gave Moses the Law, a wise arrangement that permitted the harmony of diversity within unity, that is, the unity of the distinct that allows realities to converge. This unification is not physical but human—free, intelligent and willing—

About Justice

and directed toward the same goal, not through elimination of those who are distinct but through cooperation of those who are diverse.

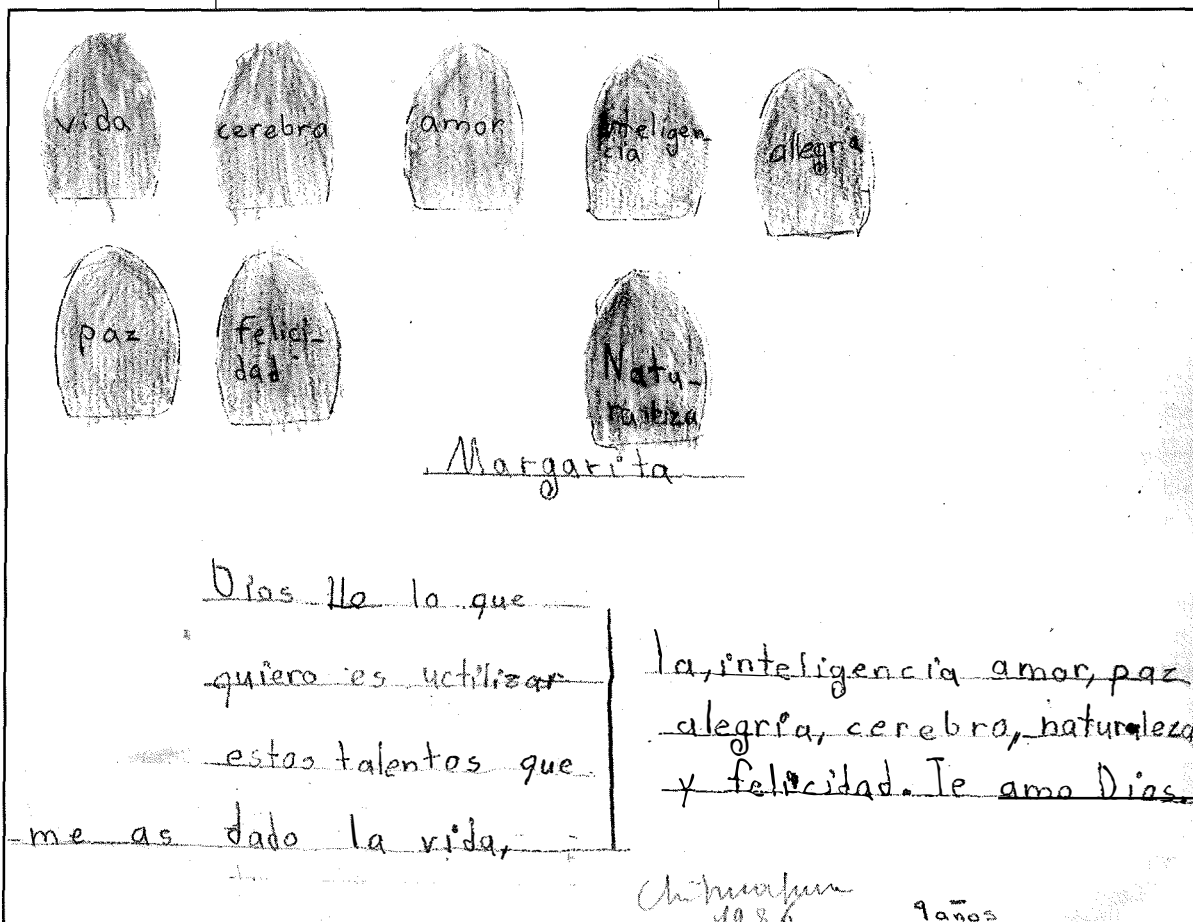
Where there is no law, relationships are disorderly; there is no order but disorder. When an organism is no longer regulated, it falls apart and dies. The Jewish people directly assigned the Law to God. God is the lawgiver; in his eternal plan, he ordered everything with wisdom and love; everything was made through the Word, who is wisdom, and in the Spirit, who is love. The Christian community considers the relationships among the divine persons to be the root and the summit of this order.

The peoples who did not know this tradition appealed to the tendencies and aspirations of human beings. Solon, Plato and Aristotle all had an intuition that harmony is the product of wise and orderly intelligence.

Those who conceived the laws of order were succeeded by those who created the institutions that implemented them. Like the tension between the arm and the mind, the wise men who studied the harmonies of peoples were followed by those who realized them. When the Jewish people increased in numbers, Moses was advised to divide them into groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties

and tens, and to assign a leader to each group. Moses was to pass judgment only on the most important things. Thus, the institution of the judges was born.

When we bring together these three elements—the plurality of human individuals and cultures, the variety of needs and distribution of tasks, and law—so that all is harmonized in a orderly way, we have the fundamental elements that realize the “will to attribute to each his or her own.” In this way each person is individually complete and harmonized with the whole, with no separation from the whole and without being swallowed by the whole. At the same time, the realities that comprise the



Margarita, age 9
Chihuahua, Mexico

The talents according to Margarita are life, brain, love, intelligence, joy, peace, happiness and nature.

About Justice



Christian, age 6
St. Hubert Parish
Hoffman Estates, Illinois

Christian said, "The Good Shepherd is the light and the light is the Good Shepherd."

each for what that person is, and is thus enhanced within creation and God. At times we believe that these processes can be substituted one for another, almost as if it would be sufficient to be just only in our relationships with God for things to go well.

This does not occur in reality. We cannot be just with God if we do not want humankind and creation to be just. Wanting to be just with God means wanting to be just with everybody: God wants a full justice.

Questions and Answers

Question: I would like to go back to the concept of justice as harmony.

Answer: Justice is the virtue of respecting reality. God takes care even of the little flowers of the field. There is nothing imperfect or maladjusted in God's plan. Even if this cannot be realized in reality by the just person, he or she still longs for it to happen.

This will is not painless. Tradition pairs the idea of the just person with the concept of suffering. For the just person, living in a world without justice, in a world that clamors for justice, in a world that poses obstacles to the realization of justice, is suffering. It is a world in which a just person would become unjust if she or he became resigned to the status quo and did not long for justice, for the "new heavens and new earth where justice will rule." The will to do justice is the will of an earnest request: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we

whole are respected, so that the multitude becomes a people. In the New Testament we read, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people . . . For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls" (1 Peter 2:10, 25). In Christ, God has given us a new Moses, a new organizer.

We can believe that living in relation with God and making humankind more human are facets of the same process. One must never separate the love for the vineyards from the love for the master.

Thus, one begins to perceive the complexities of justice. It is impoverished if it is diminished by small daily claims

without attention being paid to its sapiential dimensions, as outlined in the Bible. The human mind had an inkling of it when Aristotle stated that neither the evening star nor the morning star are as beautiful as the just. This great gift is called justice, and it is depicted as a handsome, large woman holding a pair of scales, which tends to be balanced in an orderly way.

The just person possesses his or her own choral symphonic intelligence. He or she welcomes everything and distributes to each person his or her own. For the just person, each individual has a proper place. The just person also recognizes

About Justice

wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22–23).

Our meditation might sound utopian. Injustice occurs, and there is nothing we can do about it. Reality is different. The pagan tradition as well as the biblical one perceived that it is possible to be just persons in an unjust world only on the condition that one does not surrender to injustice; one endures it, not as a victim, but with a strong will to put an end to it. The only way to be just in an unjust world is not to become an abettor of injustice, not to give it the stamp of approval, not to declare it legitimate, not to surrender to it as if it were a terminal illness.

Injustice is a human phenomenon and not a natural aspect of creation. It is bad to surrender to it. The just person suffers from injustice in the same way creation suffers from the violence done to it when its needs are ignored.

The just person suffers from the violence that is perpetrated in God's world, and unjustly so, because "from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). God created all things and made them just and, in the end, "God will be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). This transition from the initial gift to the final fruit takes place through the suffering of just persons, who endure pain, who implore, who suffer for justice, who rebel against injustice.

Liberation is a fundamental element in the search for justice. Justice does not exist without liberation from injustice. Justice must be redeemed, reconciled, liberated, purified, reconstructed on a daily basis in our hearts, minds and deeds. Justice is the desire of the individual who

wants to achieve it. In order to become the desire of humankind, it must be the initial desire of individuals who make up humankind. It is said that the just person wants the good of everyone, yet the whole is a multitude of persons.

The great truth of the Christian tradition does not only consist of acknowledging that all persons are human, but also in granting that each person is unique; the spirit of each person flows directly from God. Because of this relationship with God, an individual transcends any other created reality.

Question: Can one say that justice is a tender expression of God's love?

Answer: Yes. It is the prerogative of God's love. It is the tenderness with which God does all things flawlessly. In the beginning, nothing was imperfectly created. Jesus invited us to look at the flowers growing in the fields, at the birds in the sky (Matthew 6:26; Luke 12:24). The more

the desire for Christ envelops the just person, the more he or she meditates on all things, including Christ's grief when he saw his Father's possessions defiled and noticed that men and women do not have the will to be just. Justice is not an accessory of the faith; rather, it is the incarnation of faith. Faith without justice is unchristian.

Question: Is this a central element in our Catechesis?

Answer: Without a longing for justice, the Spirit would be absent. It is the Spirit that demands that all things be renewed in Christ.

Question: Is this the Catechesis's aim?

Answer: Yes, in so much as the Catechesis promotes full consciousness. A person has to become aware of his or her place in the universe. Each person has a name, which is given to that person to make him or her distinct from others and to



Jonathan, age 5
St. Frances Cabrini
Minneapolis, Minnesota

About Justice

enable communication with them. The Father wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). God also wants his wish to be shared by all. This applies to the divine persons as well: Each is a person and all are God. In the same way, there is only one humankind of individuals in relationship with each other. They are good when they have the desire, the hope and the love to be in harmony. Saint Alphonsus made a profound statement: "Never ask whether one loves everybody." He or she will answer positively. Ask instead whether there is someone excluded from our love, whether there is someone we would like to exclude from the cosmic harmony. A person knows whom he or she does not love.

Gianna Gobbi: While I was listening, I was thinking of our place as Montessori Catechists within this harmony. I specifically thought of the section by Maria Montessori on justice. She writes,

On the higher educational level, justice is something truly spiritual; it tries to ensure that every child shall make the best of himself (achieve his potential). Justice is to give every human being the necessary help, to bring about the fullest spiritual stature. Service of the spirit at every age means helping those energies that are at work to bring this about. This perhaps will be the basis on which society will be organized in the future. Nothing of these spiritual treasures shall be lost. In comparison with these, economic treasures have no value. Whether I be rich or poor does not matter. If I can attain the full measures of my powers, the

economic problem solves itself. When humankind as a whole can fully perfect its spirit, it will become more productive, and the economic aspect of life will cease to be dominant. Men do not produce with their feet and their bodies, but with their spirit and intelligence, and when all these shall have reached the level of development which is proper to them, then all our "insoluble problems" will have been solved. (Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, chapter 27)

It seems to me that the two facets of our Catechesis, proclamation and help, are well emphasized. I am always struck by the many writings of Maria Montessori because they are illuminated by the light of God's word. When they are read in the light of the gospel, they are made clear.

Erika, age 8
St. Frances Cabrini
Minneapolis, Minnesota



About Justice

Sofia Cavalletti: With regard to the parable of the Good Shepherd, I would like to tell you about an episode that took place recently. It helped us to understand how the parable is deposited in the deep recess of the child's heart, on a level much deeper than his mind. The story was related to me by a grandmother who had presented the parable to her two-year-old grandson. She heard him speak loudly while he was working with the sheep. He was giving a name to each of the sheep, corresponding to the people known to him. She thought that the child understood who the sheep were and asked him, "Who are the sheep, then?" The child answered, "Sheep!" On an intellectual level, he had not understood, but he knew within himself.

Father Mongillo: Returning to the concept of *unicuique suum*: This can be a difficult concept for us to understand and embrace. Part of the problem with the concept is that we tend to cling to what we have as if it were our very own, something we created or at least earned for ourselves. Therefore it is our property, our possession. If we give something to another, then we tend to focus on our generosity. What is then being overlooked is the fact that what I have has come to me as gift, that I would have nothing to give had I not already received it from someone else. There is One who gave ("For God so loved the world that he gave . . .," John 3:16); it is through God's love, God's gift, that I exist at all, or that I have anything that I can call my own. It is only through freely participating in God's act of giving—that is, by

acknowledging another's "own"—that what is "my own" is known to me or can be fully enjoyed by me.

I believe this is a very important key in reading the biblical narrative. "The earth is the Lord's"; it is not ours. We were given the earth to manage it, to help it be more fruitful. Even Peter says, "Behave as good stewards responsible for all these different gifts of God. Put yourselves at the service of others." It is grace that I administer, but I give what I have received. The culture I possess is that of my ethnic group; the language I speak was not invented by me. My physical structure was given to me by my father and mother, that is, from two worlds joined. Therefore, we give to humankind what belongs to it. If only we could succeed in discovering and making alive this feeling of being derived, of living in a borrowed world! Saint Catherine used to say, "Work in the borrowed city." God made us a loan of this city so that we could excite the memory of God. When believers realize that they possess nothing but what they have received, a feeling of not being needed is born. When you have done all you have been told to do, say, "We are worthless servants; we have done only what we ought to have done" (Luke 17:10).

Question: How can we distinguish harmonizing justice from distributive justice?

Answer: They are distinguished because not everybody acts for the sake of harmony and the two elements cannot be disassociated. If you were to bring harmony to southern Australia, how would you do it? Justice links peoples, nations, individuals, so that each brings

his or her own contribution and all of them make everything.

Another thought: Harmonizing justice has its own aim. It desires that everyone has his or her own, and it converges into the harmony of the whole. Everything was given to no one, but everyone was given what is useful for the good of all. In the letter to the Ephesians it is said that all people are given gifts according to their place in the community, and that God gave according to measure, so that no one person would be poor in this world. These are very important elements, which should be translated on the educational level.

Francesca Cocchini: On the pedagogical level we have the parables on work to be used in a complementary way: the workers called to the vineyard, the talents. Each of the parables reveals the task, the function, the work of human beings in history, then goes in a harmonizing direction.

Maria Christlieb: It is a distributive justice, only to arrive at a harmony, not because each of us has what we must have.

Rebekah Rojcewicz: It is not a question of distribution so that each has enough for himself or herself, but so that each can experience full life and realize it together.

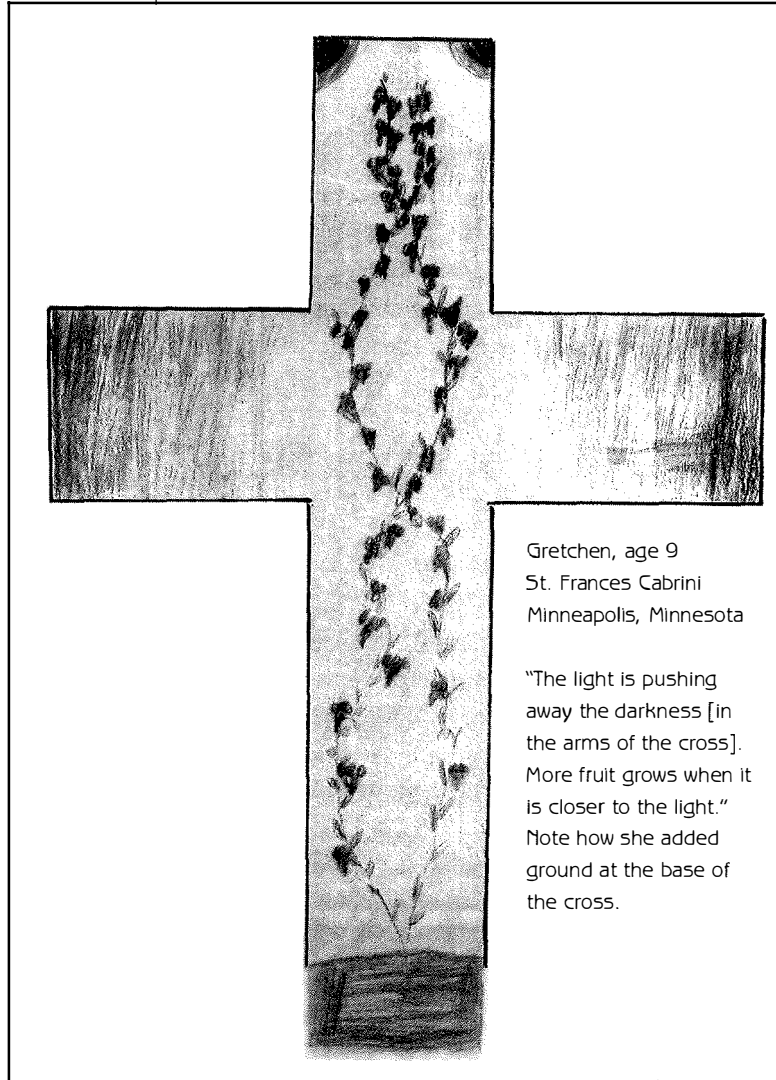
Father Mongillo: This happens in its fullest form in the eucharist, because the bread is the fruit of many grains of wheat, the wine is made of so many grapes; but if the grain is not ripe, if the grape is not ripe, they do not contribute to the making of good bread and good wine. If a grain of wheat is rotten or

About Justice

wormy, it does not make bread. It seems to me that our greatest fault is to think that we can omit perfecting single things for the sake of focusing on God. This kind of spirituality presumes to give to God what we do not give to others; it goes against God's will. God wants us to do things well. Cain's fruits were not welcome to God because they were not the best. Why does the Easter lamb have to be spotless? We botch things, who knows? Maybe someone will think, and thus he or she can have more time to pray. Humankind and God are not interchangeable. One does not love the vinedresser if he does not love the vineyard, and vice versa. The two commandments are united.

When a child concentrates, she or he makes time for everything. We suffer from delusions of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence.

Linda Kaiel: When we present the narratives of Jesus' childhood to the little ones, we are doing a work similar to the one done with typology later on. I am thinking especially of the Presentation in the Temple. When Simeon comes to the temple, he says that he came prompted by the Spirit. In the same way, when you



Gretchen, age 9
St. Frances Cabrini
Minneapolis, Minnesota

"The light is pushing away the darkness [in the arms of the cross]. More fruit grows when it is closer to the light." Note how she added ground at the base of the cross.

Linda Kaiel: If the children are helped to live with dignity, they will be helped by the Spirit to live in justice. The episode of the Presentation in the Temple appears to me to be the moment of the beginning of this journey.

Father Mongillo: I agree. To give *unicuique suum*, it is necessary also to find the way to manifest to others what pertains to them and what they can expect from us. This acknowledgement is a way to attribute *unicuique suum* because it helps the other to be more content with himself or herself. Simeon did not keep to himself what the Spirit revealed to him but shared it. The same is true of the visit of Mary to Elizabeth; both received the confirmation.

Unfortunately, we have reduced justice to a purely economic fact, even though it requires goods of different qualities, specifically the formation of people and persons. Economic goods are also required, but they are not sufficient by themselves.

*Translated by Nicolina G. Lembo Gleasure,
October 1997*

speak of moral formation as a continuous *epiclesis* upon the individuals, I am reminded that the children only begin the journey toward justice, which is realized only when everyone is moved by the Spirit. Just like Simeon, everyone begins this journey prompted by the Spirit.

Father Mongillo: As Simeon, prompted by the Spirit, recognized Jesus and Mary, in the same way when we are inhabited by the Spirit, we recognize God's gifts, which are present in the other, and give them to him or her.