



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GATHERING PROMOTED BY THE
TRIBUNAL OF THE ROMAN ROTA**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 23 November 2024*

[Multimedia]

*Your Eminence,
Your Excellencies,
Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!*

I am pleased to meet you at the end of the formation course organized by the Tribunal of the Roman Rota on the theme *Ministerium Iustitiae et Caritatis in Veritate*. I cordially greet every one of you, and I thank the dean of the Rota and those who have collaborated on these days of study and reflection. They have given you the opportunity to examine the legal and pastoral challenges regarding marriage and the family. This is very important. It is a vast apostolic field, but also complex and delicate, to which it is necessary to devote energy and enthusiasm, with the intention of promoting the Gospel of the family and life.

“Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by His earthly life and especially by His death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and also of all humanity. Love — *caritas* — is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth”. With these words, Benedict XVI began his Encyclical *Caritas in veritate* [1], in which he presents the social doctrine of the Church from the perspective of the relationship between charity and justice, and of both with truth. They are words that apply to the entire sphere of civil society, but which are shown to be fully pertinent when one considers the relationships between the faithful, and between them and the pastors, within the

People of God. It is therefore very appropriate to qualify the mission of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota as *ministerium iustitiae et caritas in Veritate* – ministry of justice and charity in truth – and this description can be extended to all ecclesiastical tribunals; indeed, it embraces all the pastoral action of the Church, which is the object of this conference.

The crux of the message I would like to leave you today is this: you are called to love justice, charity and truth, and to strive daily to implement them in your work as canonists and in all the tasks you perform in the service of the faithful. It is a matter of loving all three at the same time, because they go together – these three, no? Justice, charity and truth, they go together – and, if you disregard one, the others lose their authenticity. Indeed, our model is Jesus Christ, who is the Truth and is just and merciful.

Neither justice without charity, nor charity without justice. Charity without justice is not charity. Justice is a highly important cardinal virtue, which leads to giving every person his or her rights. And this virtue must certainly be lived within the Church too: the rights of the faithful and the rights of the Church herself demand it. However, in no human community, and even less so in the Church, is it enough to respect rights; it is necessary to go beyond rights, with the zeal of charity, in search of the good of others through the generous gift of one's own existence. It is necessary to live the service of love, because "justice is understood only in the light of ... love" [2]. Even in your legal duties you must always remember this: people are to be treated not only according to justice, which is inescapable, but also and above all with charity. Never forget that those who approach you asking to exercise your ecclesial office must always meet the face of our Mother, the holy Church, who loves all her children with tenderness.

Thus, a cold justice that is merely distributive without going beyond it, that is, without mercy, must be avoided. One can apply to justice what the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* states: "People can develop certain habits that might appear as moral values: fortitude, sobriety, hard work and similar virtues. Yet if the acts of the various moral virtues are to be rightly directed, one needs to take into account the extent to which they foster openness and union with others. And that is made possible by the charity that God infuses. Without charity, we may perhaps possess apparent virtues, incapable of sustaining life in common" [3].

But neither can one hypothesize charity without justice. In fact, Pope Benedict goes on to explain, "*Charity goes beyond justice*, because to love is to give, to offer what is 'mine' to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is 'his', what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot 'give' – give – what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them" [4]. Precisely because you love each and every member of the faithful, cultivate your juridical sensitivity, not understood, as is so often thought, as a mere fulfilment of formalities that are nevertheless due, but as a delicate recognition of what constitutes a true right of the person in the Church. His infinite dignity must be exemplarily respected in intra-ecclesial relations.

But unnecessary fears must be overcome. First of all, the fear of justice, as though it could undermine or diminish charity. On closer inspection, that fear stems from a mistaken conception of justice, thought of as a selfish and potentially conflictual claim. The essence of justice is something else entirely: it is an exquisitely altruistic virtue that propels towards the good of the other. If then this other can and sometimes must demand that his or her right be respected, this presupposes the objectivity of what is due. As legal practitioners, you have the very important task of helping to ascertain what the rights and duties of the faithful are and how they should be safeguarded, also by means of trials, which are so necessary when they are for the good of the Church and all her members.

Nor can one be afraid of charity, and of mercy as its characteristic expression. Charity does not dissolve justice; it does not relativize rights. In the name of love, one cannot neglect the duty of justice. For example, one cannot interpret the current rules on matrimonial processes as if, in the dutiful pursuit of proximity and celerity, they imply a weakening of the demands of justice. For its part, mercy does not cancel out justice, on the contrary, it urges us to live it more gently as the fruit of compassion towards our neighbour's suffering. Indeed, "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life", that is the foundation. "All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers". The three attitudes of the Lord, no? Closeness, mercy and tenderness. The Lord is close, He is merciful, He is tender. Nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love" [5].

The harmony between charity and justice is enlightened in their common reference to truth. True charity and true justice: this is the fascinating prospect and the alluring challenge of your ecclesial service. This was recalled in the very *incipit* of Benedict XVI's Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*. In this regard, he taught that: " *Only in truth does charity shine forth*, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love" [6]. End of the quotation.

Brothers and sisters, the Church places a lot of trust in you, as practitioners of justice and charity in truth. May the atmosphere of your work be that of hope, which is right at the centre of the now imminent Holy Year. The exhortation I made in the Bull of Indiction can be applied to you: "Let us even now be drawn to this hope! Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. May the way we live our lives say to them in so many words: 'Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!' (*Ps 27:14*). May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and glory, now and forever" [7].

For your mission and for your sanctification in it, I cordially impart to you my blessing. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

[1] 29 June 2009, 1.

[2] Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos* (24 October 2024), 197.

[3] 3 October 2020, 91.

[4] Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate* (29 June 2009), 6; cf. St. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio* (26 March 1967), 22.

[5] Bull *Misericordiae vultus* (11 April 2015), 10.

[6] Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate* (29 June 2009), 3.

[7] Bull *Spes non confundit* (9 May 2024), 25.

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