

Virtue of the Month reflection  
Justice – April 9, 2019  
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Be quiet in the halls!... be quiet in church!... be quiet in a library!... be quiet during the school play!... be quiet in a classroom! When I was young, I never understood why I needed to be quiet so many places. I just thought people were being mean by telling me to “shush” all the time. But then, if we stop and think about what other people are doing in a church, classroom, library, or theater, we recognize that it’s only fair that people get to concentrate and it’s not fair that I am the one that either prevents them from concentrating or causing them to lose focus. So, for example, before mass, do we sit quietly and pray, which means we are letting other people pray, or do we look around for our friends and for who to talk to? But, I’m here to talk to you about justice, not about being quiet.

What is Justice? The Virtues in Practice program say that justice is “being fair and giving each his due”. But, being just doesn’t mean being equal. For example, if one student scrapes their knee on the playground, it doesn’t mean that everyone gets a band-aid. Or the same thing with eye glasses... Just because one person gets eye-glasses doesn’t mean everyone gets the same glasses. So, justice takes some wisdom, prayer, and discernment. Much like last month’s virtue of mercy when we looked at knowing how to help a person, so with justice, we have to figure out what is fair. For example, when I was a student, sometimes I needed to talk in the stairwell after recess, but most times I could wait until I got to the cafeteria.

So, justice is being fair to others. But, just a quick caution... Let’s try not to think of justice as “quid-pro-quo”, or a “this-for-that” type exchange where we get excited when other people get in trouble. For example, look at the TV local news and you see all kinds of crimes happening and then reports on what happened to the bad guy (the perpetrator). It has occurred to me that some people really like to see other people get in trouble. If something negative happens to a person, people watching the TV news might say, “let’s put that person in jail” or “lock ‘em up”. Or at school, we might say, I hope that person gets a detention or a demerit. And if the perpetrator doesn’t go to jail or get a detention, then we say.... “That’s not fair!” The problem with that type of revenge-based interpretation of justice is that it seldom leads to inner peace for either the perpetrator or the victim. And punishing someone doesn’t necessarily make the situation better.

Or, perhaps you all saw that UVA won the National Championship last night. It was a great win! Well, think of justice like being a referee in a basketball game. Most referees don’t get excited about calling fouls, but they do it because they have to. The best referees are the ones who know when to let the players play and/or who know when to stop the game because something unfair has happened.

To be perfectly honest... and maybe I shouldn’t say this as your principal but...I don’t like giving demerits or detentions. Just like a referee calls a foul, sometimes I must give a demerit or a detention. And when I do, my prayer is always that through this demerit or detention it will

help ensure that the incident doesn't occur in the future. But, if I can avoid giving demerits, I certainly try. Because, much like what the virtue of justice asks of us, if we can give people what they need to become a good person as early as possible, we are better off than punishing people for what they have done wrong after they've done something. Meaning, if we can teach people how not to foul, or travel, or double-dribble then we are better off than giving that person a foul or a turnover.

Take the Virtues in Practice or Leader in Me programs. Those are amazing opportunities to shape your conscience and prevent you from getting demerits and/or detentions. The Leader in Me habit that tells us to "Be proactive" really will help us with justice. The idea that we can prevent injustice by being proactive is amazing! Justice is within your grasp! From 1<sup>st</sup> grade all the way to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. You are learning the "rules of the game (of life)" through these great programs.

Acts of justice start at the beginning of an action, not at the end. If justice is administered at the end, then it usually results in people being unhappy. If we think "win-win", then we will look for ways to show justice early in a process.

So, when you are coming up the stairs from recess and you are making noise with your friends, think to yourself, am I being fair or unfair? Or perhaps, ask yourself, 'How is my being quiet fair to the other teachers and students who are working hard?' And say a prayer, "Dear God, what's the fairest thing for me to do right now?" Most likely it will be to set a good example. Wouldn't it be amazing if, when we come up and down the stairs from now it, it's always quiet... not because people will be shushed or will get in trouble, but rather because it's the "just" thing to do.

When you are looking for your peers to nominate, look for the students who try to be fair with people. They are the ones that look out for other people by asking, what can I do to make sure my classmates, teachers, parents, and family are treated in the best way possible? Sometimes that means sharing a snack in the cafeteria or a ball on the playground. Sometimes it means making sure that a story gets shared that is completely truthful. Sometimes it means calling a foul on yourself during a game on the playground. And sometimes it means being quiet when other's might be affected by noise.