

Catholic Conversations

The Secular and Gospel Meaning of Justice

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The following comparison of secular justice and the justice as described by Jesus for His followers is from a talk about the passage in Matthew, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20).

Based on the talk “*The Second Step in Spirituality: The Deeper Secrets Inside the Gospels*” by Ron Rolheiser OMI at the Religious Education Congress in Anaheim California, 2016.

Secular Justice

Secular justice calls for equitable treatment and punishment. It requires us to be fair to those who are fair to us. Love those who love us. And punish those who hurt us. The Mosaic law that requires persons caught in adultery to be stoned to death is an example of secular justice.

Our Judicial System of judges, lawyers, and juries measures the amount of punishment that should result from a crime. For example, speeding in a car results in a \$200 fine. Armed robbery results in 10 years in prison. And certain horrendous crimes may result in the death penalty.

Secular justice is like an electrical wire — whatever goes into one end of the wire is transferred to the other end.

Gospel Justice

Jesus says, love those who hate you. Do good to those who persecute you. Bless those who curse you. And forgive those who kill you. (A paraphrase from the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5.)

Jesus says, “I have come to bring good news to the poor, ... to proclaim release to captives, ... to let the oppressed go free ...” (Lk 4:18)

Gospel justice is like a water purifier. Dirty, impure water comes into one end and clear pure water goes out the other end. The filter in the purifier holds the dirt, impurities, and toxins.