

Day One:

Bethany Beyond
the Jordan



The Knot of Injustice

You young people, my dear young friends, you have a particular sensitivity towards injustice, but you are often disappointed by facts that speak of corruption on the part of people who put their own interests before the common good. To you and to all, I repeat: never yield to discouragement, do not lose trust, do not allow your hope to be extinguished. Situations can change, people can change. Be the first to seek to bring good, do not grow accustomed to evil, but defeat it with good. The Church is

with you, bringing you the precious good of faith, bringing Jesus Christ, who “came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

—Pope Francis¹

To witness injustice, all you have to do is open a newspaper or click on a media website. Religious persecution, abortion, cultural discrimination, murder, theft, and more can be seen on every page. Wherever there is violation of rights or inequality, there is injustice. Injustice often provokes anger, and anger born of injustice can lead to conflict.

Sadly, injustice isn't only found in the news; it can be found in our personal lives as well. Any time we're treated unfairly, it can be a type of injustice. We see minor injustices on a daily basis, like when another driver refuses to let us into the highway lane, or when someone cuts in front of us in the grocery line. We might also see bigger injustices, like receiving an unfair court settlement or being blamed for someone else's mistake at work. Injustice is hard to bear in any form.

Signs from the Holy Land:

Crossing the Jordan

The pope's first stop in the Holy Land was Amman, Jordan. There, he greeted the king and queen of Jordan, met with the authorities of the kingdom,

celebrated Mass in Amman's International Stadium, and met with refugees and disabled young people in the Latin Church at Bethany Beyond the Jordan. It was a full day, to say the least.

But the Holy Father also visited the place believed to be the baptismal site of Jesus on the Jordan River. The area has been known since earliest times, and in modern history it was made into a national park of the Kingdom of Jordan called Bethany Beyond the Jordan. His stop there was brief, but his joy and devotion will leave a lasting effect on my heart.

I've many times pondered the text of Pope Francis's homily during Mass in the International Stadium. There's just so much "meat" to it. He explained that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus so as to prepare him for his mission of salvation—the mission of a humble, meek servant. He also explained that, just as the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for his mission, he also anoints us for our God-given mission.

The Holy Spirit . . . anointed Jesus inwardly and he anoints his disciples, so that they can have the mind of Christ and thus be disposed to live lives of peace and communion. Through the anointing of the Spirit, our human nature is sealed with the holiness of Jesus Christ and we are enabled to love our brothers and sisters with the same love which God has for us. We ought, therefore, to show concrete signs of humility, fraternity,

forgiveness and reconciliation. These signs are the prerequisite of a true, stable, and lasting peace. Let us ask the Father to anoint us so that we may fully become his children, ever more conformed to Christ, and may learn to see one another as brothers and sisters. Thus, by putting aside our grievances and divisions, we can show fraternal love for one another. This is what Jesus asks of us in the Gospel: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you always” (Jn 14:15–16).²

Our missions aren’t always clear to us, and we tend to forget that we’re anointed for a special purpose on this earth. When we’re suffering an injustice, we can feel spurned rather than anointed. Is it possible that Jesus felt this way at times, as well?

Just after his baptism, Jesus went into the desert to pray for forty days and nights in order to ready himself for what lay ahead. We, too, are anointed by the same Spirit who anointed Jesus himself, in order to be sent out, in the words of Pope Francis, “as messengers and witnesses of peace.”

The Spirit sends us out to be messengers and witnesses of peace, despite the injustices going on around us. That’s a tall order, but with the Spirit’s help, we

can do it. Listen to these concluding thoughts from Pope Francis:

Dear friends! Dear brothers and sisters! The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the Jordan and thus inaugurated his work of redemption to free the world from sin and death. Let us ask the Spirit to prepare our hearts to encounter our brothers and sisters, so that we may overcome our differences rooted in political thinking, language, culture, and religion. Let us ask him to anoint our whole being with the oil of his mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstandings, and disputes. And let us ask him for the grace to send us forth, in humility and meekness, along the demanding but enriching path of seeking peace.³

The Holy Father's words bring to mind the day I visited the Jordan River with my group of journalists. It was hot and sunny, with barely any breeze. We meandered through the busy visitor's center, and then down to the shore. The river was perfectly still, and the riverbanks were lined with trees and lush flora. A band of tourists in white robes were waiting at a shaded area downriver. They were waiting to be baptized—a popular custom among pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Across the river from us was the place traditionally held to be Jesus' baptismal site. Pope Francis would visit the spot later that same day, and so the entire area had been closed off. But I didn't need to see the exact place for myself in order to get an idea of what Jesus' baptism might have been like. I was at the same river—that itself was an incredible gift.

I could almost see John the Baptist, standing in waist-deep water, motioning for the people to come forward. He lowers each one gently into the water, and then raises them back up, dripping wet and ever so joyful. Just as he reaches for the next penitent, a man approaches the river and quietly stands on the bank. John sees him and stops mid-baptism, with a look of amazement coming across his face. It's the Messiah!

Jesus is seeking baptism, but John resists because he knows Jesus has no need of it. Jesus tells him, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15)."

Until I saw the Jordan River for myself, I'd supposed that the most awesome part of Jesus' baptism was the fact that he—the Son of God—humbled himself to be baptized. He'd come to baptize others in the Spirit, yet he sought baptism for himself because he wanted to live in perfect accord with God's law.

Even better was what came next in the narrative:

On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mk 1:10–11)

I looked up at the sky and tried to "see" the heavens opening and the dove descending. The white-robed tourists downriver helped me to imagine the many people who had come to be baptized by John. They witnessed the heavens open, and saw the dove appear. They heard the voice from heaven proclaiming, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." They came to find a better way.

Had they come to escape some form of injustice?

Along the stillness and beauty of the Jordan River, the Father revealed his extraordinary love for his Son, and from then on, it would be known to all generations. I'd heard or read that Gospel passage so many times before, but never before had I understood what it fully meant.

Here's something even more remarkable to take into account. There are rarely clouds in Israel. In fact, I didn't see a single cloud the entire ten days I was there. So, what exactly was it that opened when Jesus was baptized? I wondered what the miracle looked like, and marveled at God's power. If he can "open" the sky over Israel, he can release us from injustice.

Viewing Our Interior Landscape

What injustice burdens you? Have you been discriminated against because of your culture or religion? Perhaps it was something subtle, like a snide remark whispered behind your back, or the withholding of some privilege. That can be painful and disturbing.

Or perhaps you have suffered a deeper, more arbitrary form of injustice: Perhaps you were fired from your job without good reason, suddenly and without recourse, leaving you high and dry and without resources. Or maybe an auto accident or sudden illness left you or a loved one disabled. Coping with such things can leave you distressed and exhausted.

Perhaps, despite your best efforts, you've been abandoned, or lost something or someone precious to you. The heartbreak can consume you and cause lingering anguish. Injustice, no matter how it comes about, can be a bitter pill to swallow.

Injustice becomes a knot that can trap us in sinfulness and turn us away from God. We can become caustic and vengeful. Revenge can lead us to hatred, and that's a serious sin. Sometimes, people who suffer injustice let their anger incite them to violence and destruction. Once we've stepped down that path, it's hard to turn back.

That's why we need to turn our knot of injustice over to Our Lady, Undoer of Knots—before it entangles us in sin and ruin. We might prefer to cling to

the knot, seeking vengeance or believing we deserve restitution.

And yet, God knows better.

He knows whether we need restitution, and he knows best how to handle the people who have treated us unjustly. We don't need to seek revenge; we need to surrender the knot of injustice to Our Lady. She will know exactly how to undo it, if only we give it to her freely.

The Journey Begins:

Let Us Pray for the Gift of True Justice

Our Lady, Undoer of Knots,

The injustice I bear infuriates me. I don't want to surrender it; I want to avenge it. I want what I believe I deserve. I want the perpetrator of the injustice to make amends. I want to take matters into my own hands and set things right. That might not be the godly way of doing things, but it's the way I'd prefer to do them.

Mother, help me to turn away from my sinfulness and toward God. Take this knot of injustice from me [name the knot] and hold it fast in your hands so that I won't be able to take it back. Work on it with all your love and diligence so that it becomes a source of grace and growth rather than a source of anger and resentment.

You know that it's difficult for me to forgive and let go. Pray for me, please, and lead me to forgiveness and confidence in God's wisdom and mercy. Show me that God can handle this far better than I can, and help me to have faith and trust in him to do just that. Pray for me, that God would instill in me true justice, the ability to seek not my rights but his will in all things.

Dear Lady, along with the knot itself, I place into your hands those who have been unjust to me and any others affected by their actions. Guide them to repentance and conversion of heart.

Mother, pray for me and for all who bear the burden of injustice. I also want to unite my prayers with those of Pope Francis, asking that lasting peace may be granted to the Holy Land. Amen.

Pray the Rosary, offering it in petition for those who have been unjust to you, and others who have suffered injustice. Pray also for peace in the Holy Land. (Additional information on how to pray the Rosary can be found on pages 125–129.)

Stepping Out in Faith

Take some time to think about the questions below. Then answer them as honestly as you can so that your heart can continue to grow more and more peaceful.