

- Of all the wonderful and interesting people that I met on our mission trip to Uganda this summer, perhaps none stand out in my mind as much as a little boy named Abu.
- Abu is about 6 years old, and he's missing his forearms. His little arms end just above the elbows. But the fact that he is missing his forearms is not what sets us Abu apart. Many of the other people we worked with in Uganda are disabled in a similar way.
- What sets Abu apart is that he seems completely undeterred by the fact that he does not have hands. Although he is still quite young, Abu has learned to compensate very well and is really quite independent.
- For example, Abu can use his upper arms to manipulate eating utensils. And he can use his feet to write, and grab and handle things much like you and I use our hands.
- Like with many disabled people, other parts of Abu's body now compensate for the parts of his body that are missing or are not working properly.
- And it's a very beautiful thing to see how a person, by the force of his own will, can overcome such terrible difficulties and still lead a normal life. It's a testament to God's grace and the power of the human will.
- One of the themes of our readings today is justice. The first reading from Deuteronomy talks about the justice of God's laws, and the responsorial psalm reminds us that the one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.
- In the Gospel the scribes and Pharisees are concerned about the unjust transgression against the Jewish traditions that they perceive Jesus and his apostles are committing by not performing the ritual cleansing of their hands before eating.
- Of course the Pharisees and scribes are only concerned with keeping the letter of the law, and by neglecting the spirit of the law, they commit a far greater injustice.
- In our Catholic tradition justice is one of the four cardinal virtues. In this context justice is the virtue that inclines our wills to render unto others what is properly due to them.
- Because justice is the cardinal virtue that regulates our relationships with others, it is often considered to be more important than the other 3 cardinal virtues of prudence, courage, and temperance.
- Moreover, because it is directed toward regulating our relationships with others, the virtue of justice is directly related to charity, which also regulates our relationships with others.
- Whereas justice directs us to render unto others what is properly theirs, charity directs us to give to others out of our own goods in order to help them in their need.
- What is most fascinating about justice is that it is innately understood by man, even the merest of children. In creating us as He did, our Lord gave us all a sense of what is fair and unfair.
- Even very small children understand justice and are able to recognize it and practice it. How many times have your children complained about a sibling not being fair with them?
- We all know when we are being fair or unfair in our dealings with others. Sadly, in our broken human nature, we are often unjust in our dealings with others, which leads to fighting, division, and in the worst cases, war – or even more poignantly, divorce.
- But what is even sadder than committing an injustice is the inability to forgive an injustice.
- You see, my friends, we are all sinners, and therefore we all commit injustices from time to time, for every sin is an injustice against God if not also an injustice against another human.

- Furthermore, as Christians we are all members of the Body of Christ. Our common baptism knits us together as a family: all brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a reality that we must not undervalue or lose sight of.
- While every man is responsible for his own salvation, we are called to help our fellow man on his way to salvation as well. This is especially true if we are married and have kids, for we have a particular responsibility to help our spouses and children get to Heaven.
- Every member of the Body of Christ must be willing to help other members of the Body. Therefore as brothers and sisters in Christ, as members of the same body, we must learn to forgive those who hurt us – no matter how egregious we may think their injustice is.
- Doing so is not simply the way that we keep peace in the Body of Christ, but it is also the way that we compensate for those parts of the Body of Christ that may be ailing in some way. This is the demand of charity!
- Just as Abu learned to use his feet and upper arms to compensate for the disability of not having hands and forearms, so we, too, must learn to compensate for those members of the Body of Christ who may not be spiritually healthy.
- And as any seasoned confessor can tell you, the spiritual maladies of life are often much more disabling than any physical sickness we may have to deal with.
- Sadly, we all have the capacity within us to commit gravely evil acts. And when we do such a thing, like committing the sin of adultery or physically hurting someone, it can be difficult for the one who was hurt or offended to forgive.
- Our human sense of justice, which is often wounded and warped by our own sinfulness and emotions, may lead us to refuse forgiveness. And yet, my friends, this cannot be.
- To be a Christian means to follow Christ, and Christ came to redeem us through the forgiveness of our sins. If we fail to forgive others, we fail to follow Christ in the most important way.
- While sinners should be admonished and fraternally corrected, and while it is often just that sinners suffer consequences, a consequence that no sinner should ever suffer is the refusal of forgiveness. For refusing to forgive is the greatest injustice any Christian can commit.
- As St. Paul exhorted the Colossians: “Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you” (Col 3:13).
- My friends, if we are to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (as St. James encourages us to be in the 2nd reading), then there must be no sin that we are not willing to forgive. Like Christ, we must be willing to forgive anything, no matter how the sins of others crucify us.
- While it can be a very difficult thing to forgive, by God’s grace and through an act of our own wills, we all have the capacity to forgive even the most terrible of injustices. We just have to be willing to overlook our own emotions.
- My friends, is there anyone in your life you need to forgive? Is there anyone from whom you need forgiveness? If you need forgiveness, then repent and ask for it. If you need to forgive, pray for God’s grace and make the act of the will to do it.
- We are all members of the Body of Christ, and because we are all weakened by sin, in charity we must be willing to compensate for each other’s weaknesses if the body is to work well. This we do by bearing patiently with one another and forgiving each other when necessary.
- My friends, let us pray for the grace to forgive as Christ has forgiven us, and in so doing, let us build up the Body of Christ so that we may all one day be saved.