

Christ-like Leadership

By John Kellett '26

In the modern political landscape, a false dichotomy has emerged pitting the various virtues essential to society against one another. Political parties and ideologies tend to espouse and exalt one value at the expense of another of equal importance. What remains is a poor counterfeit of true righteousness. Such opposition sets virtue against virtue to the point that even the chosen value is diminished. It is vital that elected officials work to bridge this chasm and unite under the seemingly disparate virtues long held in conjunction by Christianity. At the foundation of this conflict are found two virtues whose union is essential in all leaders, political and otherwise: justice and love.

The virtue of justice is absolutely vital in leadership. In its purest form, justice demands that we follow Christ's teaching in Matthew 22: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The just leader ensures the rights of those he governs, a capacity integral to governments at their core. He ensures the justice of the means as well as the end of his actions, denying the poisonous consequentialism that has consumed society. Such ideals will prompt strong moral leadership that does not compromise with evil of any kind. Justice demands that leaders do not tolerate—and particularly do not *affirm*—the evils that have gained modern approval. The just leader will fight for the rights and dignity of all by opposing abortion, euthanasia, and the relativistic ethic adopted by the West.

However great the importance of justice, it is useless if untempered by love. In the United States, justice is commonly promoted by the ideological right and love by the left, but both of these approaches are utterly robbed of their meaning in separation. Cold, uncaring justice quickly becomes tyranny. Love detached from morality and direction loses its very identity and value. Only together do these virtues achieve the end of either.

To the completion of justice, the virtue of love demands that elected officials remember the value of the people they serve. Leaders are not to be detached from their constituents. They are not an elite, a ruling class, or an oligarchy. Rather, they are called to be servant leaders. Love demands that leaders seek the good of the people they serve in all things. Their primary duty is not to push an agenda, secure an alliance, or establish a contract; it is to work for the benefit of others, particularly the most weak and vulnerable.

The importance of these virtues in elected officials demands that they be actively sought. If our leaders are to be just and loving, voters must select such leaders. This is achievable through analysis of both the words and deeds of candidates. To begin with, leaders' policies will reflect their inner lives. Just candidates will constantly and consistently defend the rights of all and use only moral means to achieve their goals. A candidate who is just is uncompromisingly pro-life. He will defend the sanctity of marriage and religious freedom. He will insist upon integrity, holding firm to his beliefs and promises. Similarly, a loving candidate will be revealed through his actions. One of the firmest signs of love is a willingness to serve both inside and outside of leadership capacities. Loving leaders act with compassion toward the suffering in many of the same ways as just leaders, but they are also willing to make a difference themselves. Particularly in a world dominated by hate and injustice, these virtues will be a beacon that cannot be hidden.

Overall, the virtues of justice and love are central to authentic Christian leadership because they are central to God. This is expressed in a fascinating way in the Christ Pantocrator icon. This form of iconography depicts Christ in an asymmetrical way: one side represents Christ as Judge and the other Christ as an immanent, loving Savior. This union in Christ points to the essence of leadership. Leaders, like all Christians, are called to imitate Christ. His life is the greatest example of humble, yet strong, servant leadership, and it is vital in the modern world. If love and justice can be reflected in leadership and in the political world—in debates, in laws, in policies, and in all interactions—then it will not be our leaders who lead but Christ who leads through them. By Christ's leadership, this world may yet be transformed.