Vatican
David Ermini, vice president of Italy's High Council of the Judiciary, presents Pope Francis with

David Ermini, vice president of Italy's High Council of the Judiciary, presents Pope Francis with a judge's hat during a meeting with members of the high council in Paul VI hall at the Vatican April 8, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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People want justice, and justice requires truth, trust, devotion and integrity, Pope Francis told members of Italy's High Council of the Judiciary.

"Justice must always accompany the search for peace, which presupposes truth and freedom," he said during an audience at the Vatican April 8.

The pope met in the Paul VI audience hall with members of the high council, which regulates Italy's ordinary justice system, seeking to ensure the autonomy and independence of criminal and civil judges.

The pope said justice is usually depicted as a blindfolded woman balancing the scales in order to express the "equality, fair proportion and impartiality required in the exercise of justice."

"According to the Bible, it is also necessary to administer (justice) with mercy," he said.

Recalling the parable of the persistent widow who implored a judge every day to "render a just decision for me," the pope said, the judges, too, are called to listen "to the cry of those who have no voice and suffer injustice" so that the power they receive with their mandate is always used to serve "in favor of the dignity of the human person and the common good."

"The people demand justice, and justice needs truth, trust, devotion and purity of purpose," he said.

However, there also needs to be a "culture of restorative justice" fostered in every society, because restorative justice is "the only and true antidote to revenge" and disregard, he said.

How justice is administered must always be tended to with reforms, the way dead branches are pruned without harming "the tree of justice," the pope said. Problems that must be kept from growing are "power struggles, clientelism, various forms of corruption, negligence and unjust situations of income," he added.

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Also, when "great powers join together for self-preservation, the righteous pays for everyone," he said, pointing to Pontius Pilate washing his hands of his responsibility to render true justice.

The pope said "a beautiful prayer" is what King Solomon asked from God: "Give your servant, therefore, a listening heart to judge your people and to distinguish between good and evil."

"The credibility of witness, the love of justice, authority, independence from other powers-that-be and a fair plurality of positions are the antidotes to prevent political influences, inefficiencies and forms of dishonesty from prevailing," he said.

He asked that they find inspiration and comfort from Blessed Rosario Livatino, the first judge to be beatified.

Blessed Livatino, who was killed by the organized crime figures in 1990, saw that his call was to serve and work according to justice, he said. The pope quoted the blessed, who said, "When we die, no one will ask us how believing we were, but how believable we were."

"May the sense of justice, nourished by solidarity with those who are the victims of injustice, and nourished by the desire to see a kingdom of justice and peace come to pass, not be extinguished in you," he said.