

FAITH AND REASON

Fratelli Tutti the Social Encyclical of Pope Francis: A tool for peacebuilding: What are the great ideals but also the tangible ways to advance for those who wish to build a more just and fraternal world in their ordinary relationships, in social life, politics and institutions? This is mainly the question that “Fratelli Tutti” is intended to answer: The Pope describes it as a “Social Encyclical” which borrows the title of the “Admonitions” of Saint Francis of Assisi, who used these words to “address his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavor of the Gospel”. The Poverello “did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God”, the Pope writes, and “he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society”. The Encyclical aims to promote a universal aspiration toward fraternity and social friendship. Beginning with our common membership in the human family, from the acknowledgement that we are brothers and sisters because we are the children of one Creator, all in the same boat, and hence we need to be aware that in a globalized and interconnected world, only together can we be saved. The Document on Human Fraternity signed by Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in February 2019 is an inspirational influence cited many times.

Fraternity is to be encouraged not only in words, but in deeds. Deeds made tangible in a “better kind of politics”, which is not subordinated to financial interests, but to serving the common good, able to place the dignity of every human being at the center and assure work to everyone, so that each one can develop his or her own abilities. A politics which, removed from populism, is able to find solutions to what attacks fundamental human rights and which aims to definitively eliminate hunger and trafficking. At the same time, Pope Francis underscores that a more just world is achieved by promoting peace, which is not merely the absence of war; it demands “craftsmanship”, a job that involves everyone. Linked to truth, peace and reconciliation must be “proactive”; they must work toward justice through dialogue, in the name of mutual development. This begets the Pontiff’s condemnation of war, the “negation of all rights” and is no longer conceivable even in a hypothetically “justified” form, because nuclear, chemical and biological weapons already have enormous repercussions on innocent civilians. There is also a strong rejection of the death penalty, defined as “inadmissible”, and a central reflection on forgiveness, connected to the concepts of remembrance and justice: to forgive does not mean to forget, the Pontiff writes, nor to give up defending one’s rights to safeguard one’s dignity, which is a gift from God. In the background of the Encyclical is the Covid-19 pandemic which, Francis reveals, “unexpectedly erupted” as he “was writing this letter”. But the global health emergency has helped demonstrate that “no one can face life in isolation” and that the time has truly come to “dream, then, as a single human family” in which we are “brothers and sisters all”.

Global problems call for global actions, ‘no’ to a “culture of walls” Opened by a brief introduction and divided into eight chapters, the Encyclical gathers, as the Pope himself explains, many of his statements on fraternity and social friendship, arranged, however, “in a broader context of reflection” and complemented by “a number of letters, documents” sent to Francis by “many individuals and groups throughout the world”. In the first chapter, “Dark clouds over a closed world”, the document reflects on the many distortions of the contemporary era: the manipulation and deformation of concepts such as democracy, freedom, justice; the loss of the meaning of the social community and history; selfishness and indifference toward the common good; the prevalence of a market logic based on profit and the culture of waste; unemployment, racism, poverty; the disparity of rights and its aberrations such as slavery, trafficking, women subjugated and then forced to abort, organ trafficking. It deals with global problems that call for global actions, emphasizes the Pope, also sounding the alarm against a “culture of walls” that favors the proliferation of organized crime, fueled by fear and loneliness. Moreover, today we observe a deterioration of ethics, contributed to, in a certain way, by the mass media which shatter respect for others and eliminate all discretion, creating isolated and self-referential virtual circles, in which freedom is an illusion and dialogue is not constructive.

Love builds bridges: the example of the Good Samaritan is to many shadows; however, the Encyclical responds with a luminous example, a herald of hope: The Good Samaritan. The second chapter, “A stranger on the road”, is dedicated to this figure. In it, the Pope emphasizes that, in an unhealthy society that turns its back on suffering and that is “illiterate” in caring for the frail and vulnerable, we are all called just like the Good Samaritan to become neighbors to others, overcoming prejudices, personal interests, historic and cultural barriers. We all, in fact, are co-responsible in creating a society that is able to include, integrate and lift up those who have fallen or are suffering. Love builds bridges and “we were made for love”, the Pope adds, particularly exhorting Christians to recognize Christ in the face of every excluded person. The principle of the capacity to love according to “a universal dimension” is also resumed in the third chapter, “Envisaging and engendering an open world”. In this chapter Francis exhorts us to go “‘outside’ the self” in order to find “a fuller existence in another”, opening ourselves up to the other according to the dynamism of charity which makes us tend toward “universal fulfilment”. In the background the Encyclical recalls the spiritual stature of a person’s life is measured by love, which always “takes first place” and leads us to seek better for the life of the other, far from all selfishness.

Be at Peace: Do not look forward in fear to the changes in life; rather, look to them with full hope that as they arise, God, whose very own you are, will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will carry you in His arms. Do not fear what may happen tomorrow; the same understanding Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day. He will either shield you from suffering or will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations... **St. Francis De Sales**

Why we must use Religious Images: In former times, God who has no form or body, could never be depicted. But now that God has come in the flesh, we can boldly depict the invisible God, who has become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood. So then do not be afraid or anxious by depicting the marvelous way God has humbled himself in Christ: his birth, his baptism, transfiguration, his sufferings, his death, his miracles. Show his saving cross, the tomb, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven. Make use of every kind of illustration, word and color.

Of course, some will say. Make an image of Christ, or perhaps of his Mother and let that be enough. What foolishness, if they are willing to allow an image of Christ but not of the Saints, it is evident that their problem really is not with the use of sacred Images. They are willing to glorify Christ through an image, yet they deprive the Saints of their rightful glory. St Paul says that the "saints are fellow heirs with Christ" will be glorified with him (Rom 8:17). Such people are not waging war against images but against the Saints themselves. If the Saints are heirs with God and co-heirs with Christ, they will also share in the divine glory and dominion. If they have taken part in Christ's sufferings and are his friends, shouldn't they a share of glory from the Church on earth? ...**St John of Damascus 675-749**

A Thought for the Day

Sunday One must see God in everyone.

Monday Close your ears to the whisperings of hell and bravely oppose its onslaughts.

Tuesday It may be hard to believe in God but its much harder not to believe in him.

Wednesday My political views are those of the Lord's prayer.

Thursday Through Christ we see as in a mirror the spotless and excellent face of God.

Friday Some fellows dream of worthy accomplishments while others stay awake and do them.

Saturday An atheist hopes the Lord will do nothing to disturb his disbelief.

Act of Abandonment: O my God, I thank you and I praise you for accomplishing your holy and all-lovable will without any regard for mine. With my whole heart, in spite of my heart, do I receive this cross I feared so much! It is the cross of Your choice, the cross of Your love. I venerate it; nor for anything in the world would I wish that it had not come, since You willed it. I keep it with gratitude and with joy, as I do everything that comes from Your hand; and I shall strive to carry it without letting it drag, with all the respect and all the affection which Your works deserve. **Amen**

Mary United with her Son: Mary greets her Son along the way of the Cross. His Cross becomes her Cross, his humiliation becomes her humiliation, the public scorn is one her shoulders. This is the way of the world. This is how it must seem to people around, and this is how her heart reacts "A sword will pierce your own soul". The words spoke when Jesus was thirty years old are now coming true. They are reaching their complete fulfillment. And so pierced by that invisible sword, Mary moves toward her Son' Calvary. Christian devotion sees Mary with this sword through her heart and depicts her thus. You who shared his way of the faithful, with an inner awareness that the mystery of this suffering can be expressed in no other way. Although the pain is proper to her, striking deep into her maternal heart, the full truth of this suffering can be expressed only in terms of shared suffering compassion. That word is part of a mystery; it expressed unity with the suffering of her Son.

The thought that is not rejected produces pleasure. Pleasure leads to consent. Consent to action. Action to habit. Habit to necessity. Necessity to death... **St Bernard**

In His Will is Our Peace

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