

Twenty Ninth Sunday of the Year

'Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God' (Matthew 22:21).

We give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar when we pay our taxes, and when we obey the Covid rules even if we don't agree with them.

However our duty to God to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27) is not limited by national borders or boundaries but calls us to see every other human person not only as our neighbour but also as our brother and sister.

This is the theme of Pope Francis's new encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*. This letter was the main focus for my reading and praying during the days I was away on retreat. It is a long text (287 paragraphs) and I can only give a brief flavour of it. However I do urge you to read it in full if possible (easily downloadable from the internet) or at least look out for the summary that appears in the Diocesan Paper which will be available next weekend.

The title comes from the writings of St Francis of Assisi, a man who:
'heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life'. (FT 48)

However I fear I may have misled you a little in the past few weeks in speaking of a new encyclical on the environment. Pope Francis certainly acknowledges the environmental crisis that we face, but sees it as part of a deeper crisis of humanity:

'If we are troubled by the extinction of certain species, we should be all the more troubled that in some parts of our world individuals or peoples are prevented from developing their potential and beauty by poverty or other structural limitations. In the end, this will impoverish us all'. (FT 137)

Hence one of the main threads running through the letter is a constant return to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Pope Francis asks us to reflect on each of the characters and asks us to recognise something of ourselves in all of them. Obviously the challenge of the parable is for us to grow more and more into the likeness of the Good Samaritan, the one who showed himself to be a neighbour, a brother, to the one who was in need.

The letter contains quite a lengthy reflection on migration. The Pope himself is a descendant of migrants, and he speaks of the influence of Italian migrants on Argentina. As one who is also a descendant of migrants, I found there was much also for me to think about. The Pope makes the point that it is not a good thing that people have to leave their homes and countries in search of a better life for themselves and their families, but that as long as this continues to be the case then if we find ourselves in a country that receives migrants we need to respond with a generous welcome not least because new people with new experiences and ideas will ultimately enrich our society.

The Pope also calls for a renewal of political life based around a search for the common good of all. As an example he says:

'It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering'. (FT 186)

It is easy to be cynical about politics and politicians, it is more important to encourage and pray for those who devote themselves to this task that they can bring about good for all.

Towards the end of the letter the Pope touches on war and the death penalty, stating that the reasons that have been used in the past to justify these are no longer valid in our time and that money spent on weapons could be used to improve lives in the most impoverished countries so that people will not have to leave in search of a more dignified life (FT 262).

Pope Francis ends the letter with a prayer addressed to God the Creator which we can also make our own today:

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.

May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

For video version see: <https://youtu.be/73h1bM3dHFQ>

For full text of *Fratelli Tutti*:

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html