

REJOICE in the LORD

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On October 4, 2020, Pope Francis published his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship). The Holy Father notes in the letter that, “As I was writing this letter, the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities.” Although the text of *Fratelli Tutti* was in the process of being written well before the pandemic, its content was tragically underscored by the inability of world leaders to unite us all in a consistent, coordinated response to this global crisis.

Shortly after *Fratelli Tutti* was published, I used this newsletter (Vol. 2. No. 4., October 30, 2020) to offer a brief summary of the encyclical and its importance for our time. I had hoped to return to this encyclical earlier this year to offer additional reflections on its content, but other preoccupations—including the COVID-19 pandemic—have delayed me until now.

Fratelli Tutti is divided into eight sections. Instead of commenting on the letter as a whole, like I did last year, I want to offer some reflections on one section at a time—starting with Chapter One, “Dark Clouds Over a Closed World.” I can’t promise when I’ll get through all eight sections, but given the importance of this encyclical, I want to give it my best effort.

Chapter One, “Dark Clouds Over A Closed World,” calls attention to the serious social, economic, political and environmental problems facing the world community today. Under the subheading “shattered dreams,” the Pope points to the failure of nations and peoples to realize the vision of a better world that emerged in the years following the Second World War. “Our own days,” the pope writes, “seem to be showing signs of a certain regression. Ancient conflicts thought long buried are breaking out anew, while instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism are on the rise.” *Fratelli Tutti* continues, “In some countries, a concept of popular and national unity influenced by various ideologies is creating new forms of selfishness and a loss of the social sense under the guise of defending national interests.”

Pope Francis believes that the many problems we face are intensified by the deliberate efforts of cultural and political groups “to dominate and gain control over people” by spreading despair and discouragement, “even under the guise of defending certain values.” A feeling of fear and insecurity is promoted in the news and entertainment media, especially social media, and the result is an atmosphere of gloom and doom.

Fratelli Tutti continues:

Today, in many countries, hyperbole, extremism and polarization have become political tools. Employing a strategy of ridicule, suspicion and relentless criticism, in a variety of ways one denies the right of others to exist or to have an opinion. Their share of the truth and their values are rejected and, as a result, the life of society is impoverished and subjected to the hubris of the powerful. Political life no longer has to do with healthy debates about long-term plans to improve people's lives and to advance the common good, but only with slick marketing techniques primarily aimed at discrediting others. In this craven exchange of charges and counter-charges, debate degenerates into a permanent state of disagreement and confrontation.

Healthy debates and conversations intended to improve the common good require that we recognize and respect the rights of others to express their own opinions and to hold positions and values that we may disagree with. If our knee-jerk response is to ridicule and reject out of hand those we disagree with, there can be no genuine dialogue and no hope of finding common ground.

“Despite these dark clouds, which may not be ignored,” the pope writes, “God continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family.” The good that exists in human hearts and in our world can be seen even among the worst conditions of human existence. As Pope Francis observes:

The recent pandemic enabled us to recognize and appreciate once more all those around us who, in the midst of fear, responded by putting their lives on the line. We began to realize that our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious... They understood that no one is saved alone.

No one is saved alone. We need each other, and we need to build a world in which our common humanity is recognized as being far more important than our racial, cultural, political or ideological differences.

“I invite everyone to renewed hope,” the Holy Father writes, “for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning.” Hope is rooted in a positive vision for the future. It does not give up in the face of hardships and difficulties like those that threaten the whole world today.

Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile.

Hope makes it possible to rebuild our shattered dreams and create a world characterized by fraternity and social friendship.

Let's pray to Blessed Mary, Mother of Hope, and ask her to help us overcome the voices of despair and discouragement that surround us today. And, as Pope Francis writes in *Fratelli Tutti*, "Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope."

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

+ *Joseph W. Tobin*
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Archbishop of Newark

Pope Francis addresses all God's family in *Fratelli Tutti*

Reprinted from *Rejoice in the Lord*, Vol. 2. No. 4, October 30, 2020



The day following his visit to Assisi on October 3, 2020, the Vatican published a new encyclical by Pope Francis. The encyclical's title, *Fratelli Tutti*, is taken from St. Francis, who used these words as a term of endearment to "address his brothers and sisters" and to propose to them "a way of life marked by the flavor of the Gospel" (*Fratelli Tutti*, #1).

This new social encyclical speaks to all members of the human family, reminding us that we are all sisters and brothers regardless of our race, ethnicity, social status or country of origin. As the Holy Father writes, "If every human being possesses an inalienable dignity, if all people are my brothers and sisters, and if the world truly belongs to everyone," the Holy Father says, "then it matters little whether my neighbor was born in my country or elsewhere (*Fratelli Tutti*, #125).

The social problems addressed by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* are complex, but they all stem from a simple root cause. We have forgotten, or we never learned, that we are all members of God's family. Whatever our differences may be, we remain united as brothers and sisters who share the same dignity inextricably bound to one another because we are all made in the image and likeness of God our Father.

Pope Francis emphasizes that "Although I have written [this encyclical] from the Christian convictions that inspire and sustain me, I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will." Dialogue is key. Too often, we avoid speaking to each other, and we

don't listen, especially to those who are different from us. The Holy Father wants to change our "attempts to eliminate or ignore others" by calling us all together for simple, heartfelt conversation.

Fratelli Tutti is divided into eight sections:

- **Dark clouds cover the earth**—a reflection on the serious social ills we face today including 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 (10-24). *Fratelli Tutti* deals with global problems that call for global actions, sounding the alarm against a "culture of walls" that favors the proliferation of organized crime fueled by fear and loneliness (27-28).
- **Strangers on the road**— *Fratelli Tutti* shows how the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us to recognize the face of Jesus in all our brothers and sisters and to become neighbors to others (81), 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 (77). Love builds bridges, and "we were made for love" (88).
- **A Vision of an open world**—the need to go "outside the self" in order to find true love and happiness, opening ourselves up to the other according to the dynamism of charity which makes us tend toward "universal fulfillment" (95). Acknowledging that 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 (92-93).
- **An open heart**—the importance of welcoming strangers, especially "in response to those who are fleeing grave humanitarian crises" The right to live with dignity cannot be denied to anyone, and since rights have no borders, no one can remain excluded, regardless of where they are born (121). We are called to consider "an ethics of international relations" (126) because every country also belongs to foreigners and the goods of the territory cannot be denied to those who are in need and come from another place. Thus, the natural right to private property will be secondary to the principle of the universal destination of created goods (120).
- **A better kind of politics**—centered on human dignity and dedicated to the common good of all. A new form of political thinking which represents one of the most valuable forms of charity because it is placed at the service of the common good (180) and recognizes the importance of people, understood as an open category, available for discussion and dialogue (160).
- **Dialogue and friendship**—recognizing life as "the art of encounter" with all our sisters and brothers, acknowledging "the miracle of kindness shining in the midst of darkness." No one

is useless and no one is expendable” (215). True dialogue, indeed, is what allows one to respect the point of view of others, their legitimate interests and, above all, the truth of human dignity. Relativism is not a solution because, without universal principles and moral norms that prohibit intrinsic evil, laws become merely arbitrary impositions (206). From this perspective, a particular role falls to the media, which, without exploiting human weaknesses or drawing out the worst in us, must be directed toward generous encounter and to closeness with the least, promoting proximity and the sense of human family (205).

- **Paths of renewed encounter**— fostering peace and forgiveness while never forgetting the horrors of human cruelty and war. Thus, peace is an “art” that involves and regards everyone and in which each one must do his or her part. Peace-building is “an open-ended endeavor, a never-ending task,” and thus, it is important to place the human person, his or her dignity and the common good at the center of all activity (230-232). Forgiveness is linked to peace: we must love everyone, without exception but loving an oppressor means helping him to change and not allowing him to continue oppressing his neighbor.
- **Religion and fraternity**—true religion as a source of unity, not division, and as a means of achieving human fraternity, dialogue, common cooperation and mutual understanding. Thus, “deplorable” acts, such as acts of terrorism, are not due to religion but to erroneous interpretations of religious texts, as well as “policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression.” Terrorism must not be supported with either money or weapons, much less with media coverage, because it is an international crime against security and world peace, and as such, must be condemned (282-283). At the same time, *Fratelli Tutti* underscores that a journey of peace among religions is possible and that it is, therefore, necessary to guarantee religious freedom, a fundamental human right for all believers (279).

Fratelli Tutti faithfully reflects the teaching of St. Francis of Assisi because its central theme is unity with all creation and our solidarity with all members of the human family created in the image and likeness of God. The pope acknowledges that living this way—in accordance with Gospel values—is not easy, but the need is urgent, and God’s grace makes all things possible.


Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gómez, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has welcomed the new encyclical calling it an important contribution to the Church’s rich tradition of social doctrine. According to Archbishop Gómez:

Pope Francis’ teaching here is profound and beautiful: God our Father has created every human being with equal sanctity and dignity, equal rights and duties, and our Creator calls us to form a single human family in which we live as brothers and sisters. God’s plan for humanity, the Pope reminds us, has implications for every aspect of our lives — from how we treat one another in our personal relationships, to how we organize and operate our societies and economies. In analyzing conditions in the world today, the Holy Father provides us with a powerful and urgent vision for the moral renewal of politics and political and economic institutions from the local

level to the global level, calling us to build a common future that truly serves the good of the human person.

Pope Francis concludes his new encyclical with two prayers: “A Prayer to the Creator” and “An Ecumenical Christian Prayer.” Both call for a renewed sense of sisterhood and brotherhood among all members of the human family. Both seek “a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war” wherein we can discover Christ in each person regardless of who they are or where they come from.

Everyone should read *Fratelli Tutti*. It is a genuinely Franciscan reflection on the beauty of all God’s creation and our responsibility as family to care for one another and for our common home.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
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Special Mass to be held at Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in remembrance of 20th Anniversary of 9/11

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin and the Scholarship Fund for Inner-City Children invite the faithful to a special Mass to be held at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Newark, in Remembrance of the 20th Anniversary of 9/11 on Wednesday, Sept. 8, 2021, at 5 p.m.

The events of Sept. 11, 2001, irrevocably changed the lives of victims’ families and friends, survivors, first responders, rescue and recovery workers, volunteers, and millions of Americans and people around the world. Today, the legacies of the attacks continue to affect foreign policy, national security, civic discourse and countless individual lives.

The attacks also provided numerous examples of individuals helping others in whatever way they could, often at the expense of their own safety, under difficult circumstances. Their humanity and selflessness offer a counter to the horror of that day and provide an example as we face difficult moments today and moving forward.

For further information, please call 973-497-4279.



A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



As I was writing this letter [*Fratelli Tutti*], the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.

It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. “Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together”.

Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.

An excerpt from *Fratelli Tutti* on Fraternity and Social Friendship #7. To read the full encyclical, see:

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

My Prayer for You

I would like to once again make my own this Prayer to the Creator offered by Pope Francis in Assisi at the tomb of St. Francis on October 3, 2020:

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.

- Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

