

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: The Holy Father on Fraternity and Social Friendship

In this month of October 2024, we offer for your reflection an excerpt from the encyclical letter Fratelli Tutti from Pope Francis. Our choice is based on the text at the beginning of this encyclical letter that tells us we are all brothers and sisters.

Good reflection and sharing.

Recall: Our monthly meeting should favour an encounter with Christ. A spirit of prayer will ensure a meeting that will promote a good experience for all the members

OCTOBER 2024 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening of the meeting

With a hymn, a prayer from the Ritual or another, chosen by the fraternity, the meeting begins.

Introduction

1. “FRATELLI TUTTI”. [1] With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. Of the counsels Francis offered, I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance and declares blessed all those who love their brother “as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him”. [2] In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.
2. This saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy, who inspired me to write the Encyclical Laudato Si’, prompts me once more to devote this new Encyclical to fraternity and social friendship. Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters.

Reflection and sharing:

After the reading of the two preceding paragraphs, share what touches you particularly?
Take the necessary time to allow the fraternity members to share their thoughts.

Continue te reading.

Without Borders

3. There is an episode in the life of Saint Francis that shows his openness of heart, which knew no bounds and transcended differences of origin, nationality, colour or religion. It was his visit to Sultan Malik-el-Kamil, in Egypt, which entailed considerable hardship, given Francis' poverty, his scarce resources, the great distances to be traveled and their differences of language, culture and religion.

That journey, undertaken at the time of the Crusades, further demonstrated the breadth and grandeur of his love, which sought to embrace everyone. Francis' fidelity to his Lord was commensurate with his love for his brothers and sisters. Unconcerned for the hardships and dangers involved, Francis went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: if they found themselves "among the Saracens and other nonbelievers", without renouncing their own identity they were not to "engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake".

[3] In the context of the times, this was an extraordinary recommendation. We are impressed that some eight hundred years ago Saint Francis urged that all forms of hostility or conflict be avoided, and that a humble and fraternal "subjection" be shown to those who did not share his faith.

Reflection and sharing:

Share your thoughts on the content of the last paragraph.

Take the necessary time to allow the members to have a good sharing of their thoughts.

Continue the reading.

4. Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God. He understood that "God is love and those who abide in love abide in God" (1 Jn 4:16). In this way, he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society. Indeed, "only the man who approaches others, not to draw them into his own life, but to help them become ever more fully themselves, can truly be called a father". [4]

In the world of that time, bristling with watchtowers and defensive walls, cities were a theatre of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading through the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. He became one of the poor and sought to live in harmony with all. Francis has inspired these pages.

5. Issues of human fraternity and social friendship have always been a concern of mine. In recent years, I have spoken of them repeatedly and in different settings. In this Encyclical, I have sought to bring together many of those statements and to situate them in a broader context of reflection. In the preparation of *Laudato Si'*, I had a source of inspiration in my brother

Bartholomew, the Orthodox Patriarch, who has spoken forcefully of our need to care for creation. In this case, I have felt particularly encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, with whom I met in Abu Dhabi, where we declared that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters”.

[5] This was no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment. The present Encyclical takes up and develops some of the great themes raised in the Document that we both signed. I have also incorporated, along with my own thoughts, a number of letters, documents and considerations that I have received from many individuals and groups throughout the world

6. The following pages do not claim to offer a complete teaching on fraternal love, but rather to consider its universal scope, its openness to every man and woman. I offer this social Encyclical as a modest contribution to continued reflection, in the hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words. Although I have written it 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.
7. As I was writing this letter, the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their 2 inabilities 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.
8. 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”.

[6] 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.

Reference Notes

- (1) Admonitions, 6, 1. English translation in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol 1., New York, London, Manila (1999), 131.
- (2) Ibid., 25: op. cit., 136.
- (3) SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, Earlier Rule of the Friars Minor (Regula non bullata), 16: 3.6: op. cit. 74.
- (4) Eloi Leclerc, O.F.M., Exil et tendresse, Éd. Franciscaines, Paris, 1962, 205.
- (5) Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi (4 February 2019): **L'Osservatore Romano**, 4-5 February 2019, p. 6.
- (6) Address at the Ecumenical and Interreligious Meetings with Young People, Skopje, North Macedonia (7 May 2019): L'Osservatore

Biblical Reflection

Read the texts of the Sunday or of the day following your meeting

Share your thoughts on this gospel, using the following questions:

1. Take a moment of reflection, underline the inspiring words or phrases ...
2. Share your reflections on the evangelical text chosen ...

Life Objective

During this month of October, let us take time to celebrate the feast of our patron saint, Francis of Assisi, on the 4th of October, as well as Thanksgiving Day, precious moment in the lives of all our families ...

End of the meeting: (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

At Home

A Prayer to the Creator

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.