

Solidarity in the promotion of human dignity in the light of “Fratelli tutti” (chapter III)

On 27 March 2020, in an empty St Peter's Square before the release of the Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" (published on 3 October 2020), Pope Francis said: "Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us". On this boat we are all brothers and sisters: brothers and sisters with those of our flesh and those of our nation, brothers and sisters with those near and far, brothers and sisters among Christians or with those of other religions, brothers and sisters who are rich or poor, healthy or sick, with equal rights and duties, all children of the same Lord, created in His image (cf Gen 1:26-27), convinced that "he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him" (1 Jn 4:16). In the light of these words of the Pope we realise that the Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" is an invitation to prayer "one for the other", "called to row together" ... so that there may be "a great [human] brotherhood", without syncretism, leading to a true social friendship that allows equals to be different people; and an invitation to the „solidarity as a principle of social planning that enables the unequal to become equal" and is a hymn of human fraternity being realised in „building bridges" (cf. FT 2-4). Yes, in the same boat we must live the unique value of love, experience loving the other and going towards them, gratuitously seeking their good because the other has great value (cf. FT 91-93), the other is our brother or sister.

The Pope's words are powerful, and he encourages us to put them into practice, considering others precious, worthy, welcome and beautiful. Only by relating to one another in this way will we make possible the social friendship that excludes no one and for fraternity to become open to all (cf. FT 94); men and women, of all nations, peoples and cultures capable of a universal openness to every person who is healthy or suffering, abandoned or ignored but still, a citizen of the earth (cf. FT 98). We are all called to "make a contribution to the common good", "called to row together". As "seeking and pursuing the good of others and of the entire human family also implies helping individuals and societies to mature in the moral values that foster integral human development." (FT 112).

St Paul writes to the Philippians: „no one opened an account with me" if not you, who "have made your feelings for me blossom again". But "I speak not as it were for want. For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content therewith", "I know both how to be brought low, and I know how to abound", "I am initiated to everything, in every way: to satiety and hunger, to abundance and destitution". "Nevertheless, you have done well in communicating to my tribulation". "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that may abound to your account" (cf. Phil. 4:11-16). Here we find the deep meaning and value of solidarity,

“as a moral virtue and a social attitude, the result of personal conversion which requires a commitment, ..., and educational and training responsibilities”. It is about a family commitment “called to a primary and indispensable educational mission”, it is about education in schools and in the Church. They are the places where the values of love and fraternity, coexistence and sharing, attention and care for others are lived and transmitted. Family, school and Church are privileged areas for the transmission of the faith where “we row together” for the common good. Here we learn about the moral, spiritual and social dimension of the person with responsibility, we learn the value of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity” (FT 114), of which the Pope speaks in the Encyclical.

“It is good for us to appeal to the solidity” (FT 115) but there are two ways of giving and receiving: one, Saint Paul would say, material, carnal, human, commercial and spiritual, pneumatic, “you all are partakers of my joy” (Phil. 1:7). You can give in order to have dominion over another (the other is dependent on you) and to exercise your omnipotence because you bind the other to you. However, you can also give as “service, always looking at the face of one’s brother, seeking his advancement” (cf. FT 115). Then, there are two ways of receiving: that of taking by seizing and forgetting who gives, and from where one takes (colonial world), which is wrong. There is also the spiritual way of receiving, which is that of the Father who gives to His Son (1 Jn 3:16), who by giving himself, compromises himself, loses himself, gives to his Son so that man may regain his freedom and dignity. From here we realise that solidarity does not seek power over the other but rather seeks the other to be himself, and that solidarity means “thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few, combatting the structural causes of poverty, (inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights); It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money. Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history (cf. FT 116) says the Pope.

It is precisely throughout history that we have gone through various periods in which one or another way of giving and receiving has prevailed, and not solidarity or the freedom of the individual, let alone the communities. Let us remember the tenacity with which Saint Pope John Paul II, never surrendered to the totalitarianisms and nihilisms of the 20th century but always promoted freedom, dignity, and the values of the human person beyond any ideology. The communist regimes on the European continent and elsewhere spoke loudly of brotherhood, solidarity, and the fair payment of goods, but it was only an empty word because it was an ideology that transformed the human person by enslaving him or her to the disposition of one person; namely the big boss, one (communist) party. They turned countries into huge prisons from which there was no escape and where everything was controlled by the same single party and secret police. Pope Francis instead, makes a strong criticism of the “economy of exclusion and inequity”, of our days that “kills” and “considers the human being as a commodity, which can be used and then thrown away”; a strong criticism of the “throw away culture which is now spreading” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 53); and indeed, a criticism

of new and contemporary ideologies (neo-marxism, new nationalisms, gender ideology). Yes, it is a serious ethical and moral issue that is raised by the Church in accordance with the Gospel message, but which should be resolved by politics and the economic world, which should both be at the service of the human being.

Pope Francis, in the Encyclical "*Fratelli Tutti*", underlines that serving means caring for the fragile, for families, for the people, for all the inhabitants of the earth; this service looks, touches, feels, seeks out the brother and is never ideological because it serves people (cf. FT 115). The Philippians, in the order of God's economy and in the spirit of the service of the Good Samaritan, after having "learned, and received, and heard, and seen" (Phil. 4:9), and whose feelings had "flourished again" in a great gesture of giving to Paul (Phil. 4:10). However, "it is not your gift that I seek", says Saint Paul, "but the fruit that abounds to your advantage" (cf. Phil. 4:16). This gesture of theirs of giving, after having received, is truly a blossoming of spring after winter, new life has been born, it "abounds" to the advantage of the giver and, "abounds" to the advantage of the receiver. It is solidarity. The world exists for everyone, because all of us human beings are born on this earth with the same dignity (FT 118). Early Christians developed a universal sense of the common destination of created goods: "God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone" (*Laudato Si* 93).

The communists in Eastern Europe strongly manipulated ideologically the two principles: of the common use of goods and that of the right to private property. It was law: everything belonged to the regime and private property did not exist. It was the "multilateral developed" society, but bread was hard to come by. Human freedom and freedom of conscience did not exist. Everything was controlled. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, the 'Iron Curtain' fell, worlds opened up and Europe was being transformed. With the fall of the regime and the opening of the borders, and subsequently the entry of Romania into the European Union, more than 5 million Romanians went abroad according to the right of free movement of European citizens and many entrepreneurs from European countries came to Romania. The Catholic Church in Romania received a lot of support from the Church in Europe after the fall of the regime but, as I said, more than 5 million Romanians left Romania to work throughout the Union. We wonder what is going on? Both for the country and for the continent it was a benefit that we can read from the perspective of St Paul: "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that may abound to your account." (cf. Phil. 4: 16). If we consider this great movement of people as St. Paul thinks of it, then everything "redounds to the benefit" of all.

Thirty years after the fall of the regime, Pope Francis dreams "of a Europe that is a friend to each and all, a Europe that is a family and a community, a Europe that is inclusive and generous, a Europe marked by a healthy secularism, where God and Caesar remain distinct but not opposed. A land open to transcendence, where believers are free to profess their faith in public and to put forward their own point of view in society" (Pope Francis, 22 October 2020). These words of the

Pope apply to all Christians and to all people of good will throughout the world - the pontiff repeats this to us in the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

We here are bishops of Europe and Africa with the duty to lead our populations, our people towards “the Kingdom of God”. In the Encyclical, the Holy Father speaks of the fundamental rights of peoples, of rights without borders, of solidarity, responsibility and fraternity, of education and faith, of culture and service, of freedom, equality and fraternity. The Pope speaks of a network in international relations to solve the world’s problems, thinking in terms of mutual aid, respecting both the rights of individuals and the rights of peoples, thus ensuring the subsistence and progress of the world (cf. FT 126). Similarly, never losing sight of the Gospel and the Church’s social teaching, we must deepen the “network of relations” between Africa and Europe. We are “all on the same boat” (Africans and Europeans, Americans, Asians or Australians), we are “important and necessary” for one another, “needing to comfort each other” and to “row” together to ensure that our “planet provides land, housing and jobs for all” (cf. FT 127).

In fact, when Pope Francis states that: “The right to private property is always accompanied by the primary and prior principle of the subordination of all private property to the universal destination of the earth’s goods, and thus the right of all to their use” (FT 123) and the same as what St Paul says: “Now I rejoice in the Lord exceedingly, that now at length your thought for me hath flourished again” (Phil. 4:10), in respect of all mankind. It is about the “rights of peoples and the common destination of the earth’s goods”. It is one of the fundamental rights that precede any society “because they derive from the dignity conferred on each person as created by God”, it is “recognising and respecting individual rights, social rights and the rights of peoples” (cf. FT 124-126); it is a giving and receiving, a “way of understanding relations and trade between countries”. Further, “Christians today have a great responsibility: they are called to serve as a leaven in reviving Europe’s conscience”, and Africa “to generate processes capable of awakening new energies in society” (Pope Francis, 22 October 2020).

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(*Original text in Italian*)