



Imagine: Pope Francis and *Fratelli Tutti*

Gerry O'Hanlon SJ, theologian and author of *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis* (Messenger Publications), introduces some key topics from Pope Francis's latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*.

The story is told of a pious, but rather morose, Jesuit back in the 1960s who greeted the dawning of a gloriously sunny July day with a deep sigh and said: 'Think of all the mortal sins that will be committed today!'

The way we see reality has a lot to do with the way we imagine the world. In his latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (October 2020) Pope Francis invites us to see the world through the lens of social friendship, by showing the disastrous consequences of seeing it through the lens of selfish individualism. In a beautiful reflection on the story of the Good Samaritan Francis notes how the priest and the Levite, busy men with important duties to perform, averted their gaze from the injured man on the road. They suffered from a failure of imagination, not noticing and valuing the victim as a fellow human being. The Samaritan, on the other hand, the 'foreigner', has open eyes and attends to his



neighbour in need according to the dignity proper to any member of the human race.

Francis draws on this story to invite us, in the spirit of Francis of Assisi and of his cooperative dialogue with the Islamic leader the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, to imagine our world as peopled by brothers and sisters of our Creator God, made in God's image, each with our innate dignity. Can I be persuaded to think and behave towards the 'other' not as rival or enemy, not even as neighbour in a functional sense, but more as I would towards my own kin?

Francis shows how this new way of imagining our world has implications not just for inter-personal relations, but for social and economic policy, for all politics. So, acknowledging all the



problems involved, he invites us to see in the phenomenon of migration the humanity of the individual immigrants themselves; to see that the value of private property is secondary to the more primary value that all human beings deserve to have their basic needs met; the value of peace and the difficulty in today's world of justifying any recourse to war; the unjust nature of the death penalty; and the need to find a way through the extremes of political populism and the idolatry of markets found in many forms of capitalism.

In a world where crude discourse is rampant, not least among political leaders, where cries of 'lock them all up' have gone up from presidents, where COVID-19 experts have been described as 'idiots', where

international treaties are broken, Francis pleads for a culture of encounter and dialogue which will not ignore conflict but will continue to seek for the common good through this lens of our common humanity, our 'fraternity', our solidarity.

This encyclical is presented as a kind of Ignatian discernment. Francis is saying that just as the priest and the Levite would have hoped by passing by that their own wellbeing would not be threatened, so we in our world today are always tempted to build walls and close borders to allay our own fears. But, Francis is saying, look what happens – we become more afraid, more insecure. His grim first chapter describing our fractured world now is evidence of this. In other words, this is not some kind of utopian imagining divorced from the real world: no, in the end, because we all are sisters and brothers, it is only by behaving with open eyes to this reality that we can be happy, fulfilled, moving from desolation to consolation.

Pope Francis has admitted that the Catholic Church will only successfully fulfil its mission to bring the Good News to our troubled world if it undergoes reform. In this context he identified 'a conversion of the papacy' itself as central, and has spoken of the bishop as sometimes leading from behind in the sense of 'allowing the flock to strike out on new paths' and having a 'desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear'. This is all part of his desire to encourage open and frank dialogue. He himself

has publicly acknowledged his own mistakes and sins, not least in the sad episode of clerical child sexual abuse in the Chilean Catholic Church. In this spirit of open dialogue, it is right to note that the controversy around the title of this encyclical and the relative invisibility of women in the document itself, is surely a missed opportunity, a distraction at best and a real obstacle to reception of the document for many. A recent letter to *The Tablet* from a female correspondent put it well: 'May I call on Pope Francis to begin his next encyclical with *Sorrelle Tutte?* I would love to see how the chaps react to that'.

Sometimes we Catholics get uncomfortable with criticism like

this and prefer to move on. I have so often heard it said, for example, that if only Mary McAleese would say what she has to say differently, not so sharply! But prophets are never comfortable companions – look at Jesus himself. Think of how he allowed the Canaanite woman to challenge him openly, and his robust dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well. The Pope has admitted that we in the Catholic Church have a real issue around the visibility of women and their role in decision-making. Let's hope that in the near future our Church will move decisively on this issue, and thus facilitate an even more receptive hearing for encyclicals with marvellous content like this one. ♡

PETITION

First Friday:
5th February 2021

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