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The Boldness of Fratelli Tutti

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None of us is an island, autonomous and independent from others. We can only build the future together, without excluding anyone. How wonderful it would be if the growth of scientific and technological innovation would come along with more equality and social inclusion.

How wonderful would it be while we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of our brothers and sisters, who are orbiting around us. Only by an education in fraternity towards a real solidarity can we overcome the “culture of waste” that doesn’t just concern food and goods, but first of all people (Pope Francis in *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word*, 2018).

In Pope Francis: A Man of His Word (Wenders, 2018), a documentary born out of an interview with the bishop of Rome, the pope expresses his own principles and perspectives on present realities and how he thinks we must face and resolve the global concerns that we have today. At the same time, it allows us to have an in-depth knowledge of who this man, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, is and how he envisions a better world. The ideas he has shared in this documentary that was premiered in 2018 gives us a prologue of what was going to be his next encyclical. The documentary starts with an introductory feature on St. Francis of Assisi who was Pope Francis’s inspiration in writing Laudato Si in 2015 and now, after five years, in writing Fratelli Tutti (2020).

“Fratelli tutti” (hereafter FT). Just like “Laudato Si,” these Italian words were lifted from the writings of St. Francis. *We are all brothers and sisters.* The image of a global family comes to mind when we hear this, and it is what this thirteenth-century saint of the poor and of peace wishes to impart to us in his writings and in the stories of his mission and encounters. Inspired by him, this is also the message that Pope Francis tells us in FT, which calls for global solidarity and for the upholding of the common good. The Holy See addresses this document as an invitation for dialogue and reflection, not just to the Catholic faithful, but to “all people of goodwill” (FT, no. 6). With this, Pope Francis leads our reflection in the second chapter with the Gospel story that has a universal message, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37), by inviting us to enter into the story, where we are given two choices: to ignore those who are hurting and take the easier road of apathy and indifference, or to stop and give attention to their needs and take part in the healing process. With this, he invites us to rediscover and reclaim our basic calling of being “citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond” (no. 66), where we “identify with the vulnerability of others, ... reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbours, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good” (no. 67).

Who is my neighbor? This is the question asked by a lawyer to Jesus, our story-teller, that prompted him to tell the said parable. In response, Jesus turned this question on its head with another question: “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of

robbers?” (Luke 10:36). The three, as we know, would be the priest who passed on the other side, the Levite who did the same, and the Samaritan who helped the man, brought him to a place where he could recover and paid for his needs. To Jesus’ question, the lawyer replied, “The one who had mercy” on the man who was left by the robbers at the wayside.

It is interesting to note that in the Philippines, the term *neighbor* is directly translated to the word, *kapitbahay*, referring to someone who lives just next door or in a house adjunct to one’s own (note: the verb *kapit* means *to hold on* and the adjective *kapit* or *nakakapit* means *attached*). In rural areas and provinces, when you are a new neighbor in the Philippines, you are welcomed by almost the whole community. Immediately, it is either you are called by younger members of the community as an *ate* or a *kuya*, or even *nanay* or *tatay*; or you are given the liberty to call the more senior members as *ate* or *kuya*, *manang* or *manong*, *nanay* or *tatay*, etc.¹ These are terms we use to address family members, and this *family-ness* extends beyond the walls of one’s home. Soon enough, one’s home is open to the neighbor, and the latter is treated like a part of the family. And in a way, the whole neighborhood becomes a big family.

With the message and the spirit of compassion and mercy that Jesus illustrates in the parable, Pope Francis’ invitation is to extend this *family-ness* beyond differences, geography, culture, nationality, race, and religion; and what more—even beyond faults and sins (no. 191)! For human dignity is primary and is the fundamental driving force for social friendship and fraternity.

Virtual Boldness

At this time in history, it seems easy to reach out to one another with technology, as the internet makes the world smaller. However, as the Holy See points out: ironically, digital connectivity seems to not provide or account for authentic connection (no. 43). It is true the worldwide web keeps us in touch with one another despite physical and geographical distances, and lets us see and know what we have not seen before the age of information. However, on a larger and wider scale, this virtual space of connection makes us take for granted real and actual connection where we are able to hug, express authentically beyond emoticons and words, commune and grow in respect despite differences. It seems that in this world where there is the digitalization of exchanges and encounters, and even of the memories of them, we seem to have mustered the bravery—albeit virtual—of being outspoken, of #realtalk, and of blunt articulation that gets to the point of cruelty and the dismissal of the Other. Moreover, it has celebrated an unhealthy sense of isolation that may grow conjunctly with addiction, while it substitutes for real encounters that celebrate “physical gestures, facial expressions, moments of silence, body language and even the smells, the trembling of hands, the blushes and perspiration” (no. 43), which are all an essential part of what is truly and naturally human. And sadly, this act of withdrawing into isolation, too, may also disguise itself as an expression of bravery.

Apart from these, the present socio-political affairs all over the world seem to exhibit a boldness that is rather angry, cruel, harsh, demeaning, over-bearing, and violent. Iron men and women have been commended and elevated to positions of power. Boldness and strength in the political arena are equated to how foul-mouthed and punitive they relate to others to show political will, how merciless they are towards law violators, opposition and those who would fall outside the definition of constituent in the name of social order, how they ensure national security with contemporary armament such as nuclear weapons, and how they *wag the dog*, so to speak, or

manipulate the political situation that would allow them to acquire more power, divert attention from real issues or extend their terms.

These may very well be among the “false securities” that the present situation of the pandemic has made ever more apparent and felt, as the Holy See has mentioned in the encyclical (no. 7).

Authentic Courage

Among the many remarkable things about FT, I would like to share that what is personally striking for me is the pairing of charity with courage (no. 174), which is rather uncommon in our world nowadays. In our time, love, compassion, charity and the like seem to weaken the impact or lessen the power or strength that is associated with courage or bravery. It is as if true courage must always instill fear or even terror. However, this is not the kind of courage that FT is inviting us to own.

Courage is repeatedly stressed on—implicitly and explicitly—by Pope Francis at every stage of working towards the goal of the common good; and this makes the encyclical, for me, an empowering read. Furthermore, the encyclical, I think, is *a courageous call to embrace courage*, as it presents itself as a pronouncement, from the head of the universal Catholic Church, that is addressed *beyond the borders* of the Church (no. 6). It takes a bold step to recognize the uncomfortable and hurtful truths of our situation—the “dark clouds over our closed world” (nos. 9-53)—and to exhort us all to hear the voices (no. 98) of those who suffer because of these *dark clouds* that “hinder the development of universal fraternity” (no. 9) with those who remain wounded, unnoticed and rejected at the roadside.

Pope Francis also leads us to the very core of recognizing and giving heed to these voices, which is the upholding of the dignity of each person. With this, he encourages us to take heart in being open to a globalization that does not suppress the individuality and the unique gifts of each person, but welcomes them for the sake of the common good, rather than just for the benefit of a few (FT, no. 100)—no matter how different others’ views may be from the status quo or from the usual way that economics and politics are done. For without them, “democracy atrophies, turns into a mere word, a formality; it loses its representative character and becomes disembodied, since it leaves out the people in their daily struggles for dignity, in the building of their future” (no. 169). Thus, with courage, love allows for the reclaiming of politics from its usual characterization that is corrupt, self-serving and destructive; and we are led to a more fundamental dimension of politics as “a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good” (no. 180). This kind of politics looks beyond self-interest and places each person as among people (no. 182). This kind of politics constitutes “acts of charity that spur people to create more sound institutions, more just regulations, more supportive structures” not just for those from whom one benefits, but for everyone (no. 186), especially, for “those in greatest need” (no. 187). To revert to this kind of politics takes so much courage, for it necessitates that we allow “the smallest, the weakest, the poorest ... [to] touch our hearts ... to appeal to our heart and soul” (no. 194). And so, it also commands us to engage in “courageous dialogues” (no. 198) that make us see the truth, that let us be keen in listening to differing opinions, that can transform us, and that can, hence, instill a culture of encounters that is directed beyond what is familiar, welcome and convenient. Through this, we would be able to carry out the bold mission of peace that is open-ended (no. 232) and that places the poor and vulnerable at the top of priorities, because—

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... peace is not merely an absence of war but a tireless commitment—especially on the part of the of those of us charged with greater responsibility—to recognize, protect and concretely restore the dignity, so often overlooked or ignored, of our brothers and sisters, so that they can see themselves as the principal protagonists of the destiny of their nation (no. 233).

Truly, it takes a lot of courage nowadays to vie and work for the common good, for peace, for justice and for all the good things that we desire to have in our society—considering all the hate that one experiences, online and offline. For instance, in this age of the social media where there is more than one convenient way of articulating our opinions, we can easily be taken up by it and have our first-hand experience of the *cancel culture*. A charitable act or an outright call for charity—a call for care for others or for the environment—can also outrightly be tagged as self-righteousness or a *contemporary twisted take on righteousness*. And in turn, any well-meaning call for change may become tainted by hatred because of the “virtual” experience of rejection. And on the other hand, some other people may resort to withdrawal or non-engagement due to fear of engagement itself or of being misconstrued (nos. 27 and 30). These two poles may very well represent some forms of violence that we—knowingly and unknowingly—commit against ourselves and other people, as they lead the human spirit to its demise.

Pope Francis reminds us that it is not an easy task, or it is even “naïve and utopian” (no. 190). However, this lofty mission is shared by all—regardless of race, economic status, religion, political standing, social role, etc. And we cannot simply get rid of the ideals that we have for the world, because—

... hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. 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 (FT, no. 55).

As Christians, we hold on to this courage that Jesus Christ, himself embraced as he fulfilled his mission for God’s reign on earth. He knew that he was going to be in between two big grinding stones when he went on proclaiming the Kingdom of God—between those who caused injustice and the victims of injustice who feared veering away from the status quo; between those who keep peace by instilling fear and those who fear disturbance amidst it. Both of these sides, we all know, were not upholding the real essence of peace where there is freedom and integral development that would benefit everyone.

Likewise, this is the same boldness that Mary upheld when she went in haste to be with her cousin, Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-52). In this Gospel pericope of the Visitation, aside from traveling alone and a long distance from her home in Nazareth, Mary showed us an extraordinary and spirited courage in taking a prophetic voice in her *Magnificat*—a voice usually taken only by men—and sang the faithfulness of God amidst the socio-political conditions, which is quite an unusual topic for any woman during her time. Pope Francis also alludes to this event in the encyclical as he talks about the calling of the Church as—

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... a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity ... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation (FT, no. 276).

But then, again, this courage does not take its driving force from any external force, such as money, political power and weapons. This courage has its wellspring in something that is interior, something that is also the foundation of lasting peace and the right kind of politics that will serve the needs of every person and foster social friendship and *family-ness* beyond all boundaries and obstacles. This wellspring is love. After all, the origin of the word courage is the Latin word, *cor*, which means heart. The heart is where charity and courage could rightfully meet and bear fruit. And if you are ready to take the challenge of making this meeting real and letting it bear fruit, take it from Pope Francis in his *Fratelli Tutti*.

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ⁱ *Ate* is used to address an elder female sibling, while *Kuya* is for an elder male sibling. In some parts of the Philippines, *manang* is the elder sister and *manong* is for the elder brother. *Nanay* refers to the mother, and *tatay* to the father.