

20th February 2021
18/2021

BUILDING A SOCIETY BASED ON CARE AND SOLIDARITY

PASTORAL LETTER FOR LENT 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus invites us to "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15). He calls us to embrace the Good News and delve deeper into the essence of our faith, as Jesus himself explains: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

God is love and he calls us, his sons and daughters, to abide in love. Jesus tells his disciples "you are all brethren" (Mt 23:8), and this is why we refer to God as our Father. This is the message that Pope Francis wishes to convey to us in his encyclical on fraternity and social friendship *Fratelli Tutti*. Inspired by the Pope, we wish to share his message and invite each and every one of us to build a society based on care and solidarity.

Those who are in the periphery or rejected

First and foremost, our thoughts turn to people who feel marginalised or in the periphery, those who at times are victims of what the Pope calls "the throwaway culture". The COVID-19 pandemic has made certain realities more evident, such as the many people who feel isolated and lonely, or those who are experiencing a deep sense of emptiness in their lives. Throughout this time, mental health problems and suffering caused by strained relationships have increased.

When faced with the reality of those who are suffering, we can either ignore them and keep going our own way, or we can stop to help them. We wish to honour the many people who show care and solidarity to vulnerable persons in practical ways. They remind us of the importance of listening to the cry of those who are suffering, and also to the silent plea of those who are suffering in silence.

Pope Francis continually reminds us to listen to the cry of those who are seeking shelter as they flee from grave humanitarian crises; to listen to the narrative of their shattered lives and to offer an environment in which they feel welcomed, protected, supported and integrated.

Overcoming the virus of individualism

Pope Francis invites us to work towards the universal aspiration of fraternity, that begins by recognising that we are all brothers and sisters. The Pope explains how a globalised society often brings us closer to one another, however this does not make us brothers and sisters. It is entirely up to us to commit ourselves to love and cherish one another.

It is only when we open our hearts to the love of God and share this love with others that we will live in fraternity, genuinely caring for others and their well-being. In this context, we no longer consider others as our opponents but as our brothers and sisters. Together we can strive for a society without walls or borders that separate us. This is how we can overcome the virus of individualism. Our fulfilment is found in giving ourselves to others and not in isolating ourselves and focusing entirely on ourselves.

Dialogue

As brothers and sisters we should be able to work together for a society based on dialogue through which social friendship is nurtured. Dialogue respects, strengthens and seeks the truth. It helps us draw nearer to each other, see one another and practise with others what Pope Francis calls “the art of listening”. Dialogue allows us to express ourselves respectfully and to contribute without fear. A person who is able to dialogue with gentleness is truly capable of respecting others.

Dialogue helps us to understand that those who are different from us may still enrich our lives, since our differences represent an opportunity for us to grow together.

Healing our wounds

As we dialogue, we need to acknowledge that we are wounded as individuals or as a society. Some wounds are borne within us and in our personal relationships, others may be present in public life and in the life of our communities. A few examples of these are tribalism, racism, hatred, domestic violence, broken families, usury, alcohol and drug abuse, greed, abuse of power and also the uglification of our natural heritage.

We need to work on healing these wounds in a spirit of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not imply forgetting, allowing our painful experience to be suppressed within us, or remaining silent when faced with wrongdoing or injustice. Forgiveness does not imply impunity. Forgiveness means not allowing the negative experiences we pass through to enslave us and condition us. Forgiveness frees us from the vicious circle of revenge, as we continue to work wholeheartedly for justice and righteousness. The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* invites us to break chains through our love, and not to create new chains. It invites us to build bridges and not walls. Only then will we be able to overcome prejudices, the walls that were built over the years, and take an active part in the healing of a wounded society.

Safeguarding life

In a spirit of care and solidarity we need to work harder for a culture that respects the life and dignity of every person. Every human life is precious and is created in God's image. It is this protection of human life, from the first moments of conception, throughout every moment of life, until its natural end, that forms the foundation of a culture of respect for the rights of every person. The weak and vulnerable require more attention and care. No one is useless, no one should ever be eliminated.

St Joseph – a marvellous inspiration

In our endeavours towards a society of care and solidarity, we are presented with a marvellous example in the person of St Joseph, whom Pope Francis wished to offer as an inspiration during this year dedicated to him. St Joseph is the person who passed through moments of crisis and suffering. As a refugee, he had to seek refuge for his family away from his homeland. Nevertheless, St Joseph always had great faith in God, he always showed love and kindness to others and was always ready to help. He is a person who listens while courageously taking action to protect the lives of Mary and of Jesus, even before he was born. St Joseph shows us the true heart of a father.

During this period of Lent, we pray for his protection and intercession, that throughout this year he may help us all to be instruments of care and solidarity in society.

We cordially impart our pastoral blessing.

✠ **Charles J. Scicluna**
Archbishop of Malta

✠ **Anton Teuma**
Bishop of Gozo

✠ **Joseph Galea-Curmi**
Auxiliary Bishop of Malta