

UISG – Sisters Share Reflections on the Encyclical “FRATELLI TUTTI”

What has struck me about the Encyclical?

It is a wonderfully dense and challenging text that requires prayerful reflection, study and rereading many times. It uses the SEE- JUDGE-ACT methodology or what can also be called the pastoral cycle (EXPERIENCE – SOCIAL ANALYSIS – THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION – ACTION).

Seeing: However Pope Francis reminds us that God sees with the heart. He reminds us that we can't see from afar in photos or videos but we need to touch and taste and smell the needs of the poor and the vulnerable. Remember he spoke in the past about having the smell of the sheep. This is what we as sisters are called to do – to enter into vulnerability and poverty because it is there that we discover our own vulnerabilities and poverties. There is where we become brothers and sisters together. We have surely discovered this during this time of pandemic.

Judging: We need to look at the root causes of what keeps people in poverty and what prevents them from flourishing. No matter where and with whom we are ministering we must undertake an analysis of the situation and see what is holding people down. We must also look at the call of the Scripture, of the Fathers of the Church and of the encyclicals to see where there is a gap between who we are called to be and how people are treated in reality.

Action: Finally we are called to act at every level. These can seem tiny seeds sown by individuals to movements advocating for political, social and economic change.

There are several images or phrases which struck me in the text.

We have created a culture of WALLS:

These are walls in the heart and also on the land. They are walls of exclusion which prevent encounter with other cultures, with those who are different to us. These are walls which make us slave within our own narrow compounds and reduces our horizons and we can't see beyond ourselves.

We are all in the same BOAT.

Recently I heard someone speaking about all of humanity being in the same SEA, but in different boats. Some are in yachts and other are clinging to the debris in the ocean. We have to ask ourselves “what kind of boat am I in.”

In this same BOAT or SEA we have to choose between isolation and indifference or closeness and encounter. This second is a radical choice if we want to create fraternity and social friendship.

We have lost the TASTE of FRATERNITY.

In the Franciscan tradition while fraternity was used by St. Francis to describe a community of friars it was also used in a much more expansive sense. It had to do with the kind of relationship which a person has with others especially with the stranger who is different. Fraternity calls us to have a flavor of what is truly real. We need to know who are being sacrificed and discarded in our society today – the elderly, the unborn, the unemployed, those trafficked and exploited, those who suffer terrorist attacks, those who feel alone and isolated.

Fraternity requires us to rethink our lifestyles, our relationships and how we organize society. It calls us challenge a world system that has been co-opted by economic and financial interests. “Opening up to the world” doesn’t apply to those who seek new opportunities for themselves and their families. Fraternity requires us to examine the meaning of our existence and to dream together as a single family living in a common home about how we should live together.

We PLUNGE into FEVERISH CONSUMERISM and GORGE OURSELVES in NETWORKING

These verbs are very strong and they represent the temptations that cause us to look away from the suffering of people and the planet. But the kind of networking that we engage in create superficial relationships and don’t create community.

We need one another if we are to rebirth the human family. We need everyone to participate – every face, every hand, every voice from beyond the walls that we have constructed.

Create a COMMUNITY of BELONGING with NO BORDERS.

We need to create a solidarity that is worthy of our time, our energy and our resources. So many in our world feel themselves less worthy, less important and consequently less human. Think of the migrants fleeing from war and natural disasters or rightfully seeking new opportunities but who are so often exploited, separated and uprooted leading to the fragmentation of communities. Fear often closes us off to them and to many others who likewise are in great need. We as sisters are called to build bridges.

It is no coincidence that the UISG project in Sicily emphasizes the building of bridges between migrant and local people. We have to build those bridges wherever there is division and separation between rich and poor, between people of different faith traditions, between different cultures and nations.

We must travel the ROAD OF CLOSENESS

This is the road that we must travel into the future, a road marked by a culture of dialogue and encounter which is mutually enriching. When I reach out to the others beyond my comfort zone, I can be truly transformed by the other. I may begin by thinking I am bringing something to the other but I will conclude by realizing how I have been enriched. The road of closeness calls us to embrace the stranger, to enter into the suffering of others, to identify with the vulnerable and to be open to be changed by people who are different to me.

We know that God continues to sow seeds of goodness through the daily efforts of people everywhere. However there is a need for a healthy politics capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practice and overcoming undue pressure. The solution is not about quick fixes or a piecemeal approach. A healthy politics oversees an economy that is an integral part of political, social, cultural and popular programmes that are directed to the common good. Each one of us but especially each political leader needs to constantly ask the following questions:

How much love do I put into my work?

What am I doing for the progress of others?

What mark am I leaving on society?

What real bonds am I creating?

What positive forces have I unleashed?

What social peace am I sowing?

What good am I achieving?

Ultimately we need to ask ourselves “will we bend down to help another get up?”

Sr. Pat Murray, ibvm
5 October 2020