

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: Brothers and Sisters all ...

In the month of November, we are proposing to work on a first excerpt from Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti*, on fraternity and social friendship. We will look at the first paragraphs of this letter which particularly speaks to us as members of the Franciscan Family. These words will remind us particularly of our patron saint Francis of Assisi.

Good reflection and sharing

Recall: Our monthly meeting should favour an encounter with Christ. A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes communal experience. At the meeting, having a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the Rule and General Constitutions, will provide clarity and depth for our edification and experience.

NOVEMBER 2020 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening of the meeting:

The members can offer suggestions for a song by selecting one according to the theme or the month of the year. After the chosen song, the prayer according to the Ritual or one chosen by the fraternity starts the meeting.

Introduction

1. "Fratelli tutti".[1] With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. Of the counsels Francis offered, I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother "as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him".[2] In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.

2. This saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy, who inspired me to write the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, prompts me once more to devote this new Encyclical to fraternity and social friendship. Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters.

Reflection and Sharing: After the reading of the preceding text, share your thoughts on the content of the two paragraphs. Do they seem to recall for you certain acts and writings from our patron Saint Francis. Can you name some. Which ones?

WITHOUT BORDERS

3. There is an episode in the life of Saint Francis that shows his openness of heart, which knew no bounds and transcended differences of origin, nationality, colour or religion. It was his visit to Sultan Malik-el-Kamil, in Egypt, which entailed considerable hardship, given Francis' poverty, his scarce resources, the great distances to be traveled and their differences of language, culture and religion. That journey, undertaken at the time of the Crusades, further demonstrated the breadth and grandeur of his love, which sought to embrace everyone. Francis' fidelity to his Lord was commensurate with his love for his brothers and sisters. Unconcerned for the hardships and dangers involved, Francis went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: if they found themselves "among the Saracens and other nonbelievers", without renouncing their own identity they were not to "engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake".[3] In the context of the times, this was an extraordinary recommendation. We are impressed that some eight hundred years ago Saint Francis urged that all forms of hostility or conflict be avoided and that a humble and fraternal "subjection" be shown to those who did not share his faith.

Sharing:

Do you know the story of the meeting between Francis and the Sultan? If yes, what do you remember from your reading? Share your memories.

Continue the reading

4. Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God. He understood that "God is love and those who abide in love abide in God" (1 John 4:16). In this way, he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society. Indeed, "only the man who approaches others, not to draw them into his own life, but to help them become ever more fully themselves, can truly be called a father".[4] In the world of that time, bristling with watchtowers and defensive walls, cities were a theatre of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading through the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. He became one of the poor and sought to live in harmony with all. It is Francis who inspired these pages.

Sharing:

Have you ever felt the inner peace similar to that of Saint Francis? When did you feel it? Take time to share your thoughts.

Continue the reading

5. Issues of human fraternity and social friendship have always been a concern of mine. In recent years, I have spoken of them repeatedly and in different settings. In this Encyclical, I have sought to bring together many of those statements and to situate them in a broader context of reflection. In the preparation of *Laudato Si'*, I had a source of inspiration in my brother Bartholomew, the Orthodox Patriarch, who has spoken forcefully of our need to care for creation. In this case, I have felt particularly encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-

Tayyeb, with whom I met in Abu Dhabi, where we declared that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters”.[5] This was no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment. The present Encyclical takes up and develops some of the great themes raised in the Document that we both signed. I have also incorporated, along with my own thoughts, a number of letters, documents and considerations that I have received from many individuals and groups throughout the world.

Reflection and sharing:

After the reading of this last paragraph, take the necessary time to share your thoughts.

Biblical Reflection:

Read the Gospel of Sunday following your meeting in order to be prepared to hear the celebrant's homily. Share your thoughts on this gospel, using the following questions:

1. To whom does it speak? What does it teach us?
2. How does it reach us personally?
3. Is it a message of hope? Another kind of message? How and why?

Reflection on the link with the Rule and the General Constitutions

We have a life project, a form of life, - our Rule. We suggest that you read Article 13 from **Chapter II, the Way of Life and Apostolic Activity**, Articles 18.2 and 18.3 of the General Constitutions.

Rule

Article 13

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the first-born of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

General Constitutions

Article 18.2

They should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.

Article 18.3

They should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to "create worthy conditions of life" for all and to work for the freedom of all people.

Life Objective

In this month of November, although our meetings are restricted, let us establish links through all possible means to maintain our fraternities in the peace and joy of the Lord.

Events and information from the Church and the Order

As all the gatherings or meetings are still restricted or postponed, let us reserve more time to pray even more for the Church, the Franciscan Family, the sick, the persons alone and the families.

We also pray for the doctors, nursing personnel and all the people who remain in service. May God give them health and strength. May their devotion inspire thankfulness in us and may we not hesitate in expressing it to them.

End of the meeting: (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

At home

In this last paragraph, Pope Francis tells us that this encyclical letter does not claim to summarize the doctrine on fraternal love but rather presents us with certain aspects of it.

6. The following pages do not claim to offer a complete teaching on fraternal love, but rather to consider its universal scope, its openness to every man and woman. I offer this social Encyclical as a modest contribution to continued reflection, in the hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words. Although I have written it from the Christian convictions that inspire and sustain me, I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will.

Notes on the references presented in the texts chosen for this edition of Living Fraternity.

[1] Admonitions, 6, 1. English translation in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol 1., New York, London, Manila (1999), 131.

[2] Admonition, 25: English translation in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol 1., New York, London, Manila (1999), 136.

[3] SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, Earlier Rule of the Friars Minor (Regula non bullata), 16: 3.6: op. cit. 74.

[4] ELOI LECLERC, O.F.M., Exil et tendresse, Éd. Franciscaines, Paris, 1962, 205.

[5] Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi (4 February 2019): L'Osservatore Romano, 4-5 February 2019, p. 6.

Please note that you can find the admonitions in other published writings.