

## 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Pope Francis earlier this month released his new encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Saint Francis of Assisi addressed those two Italian words to his “brothers and sisters all,” and proposed a way of life marked by the gospel. Pope Francis says he wrote this encyclical “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.” As he was writing this encyclical, the pandemic erupted, and Francis noted the very problem he wanted to address: countries unable to work together. He writes, “For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all.” The pope’s desire is that “by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity.... Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.”

Some people got distracted from this lofty message because of the pope’s comments on a different topic from an interview made public last week. He said, “Homosexuals have a right to be a part of the family. They’re children of God and have a right to a family. Nobody should be thrown out, or be made miserable because of it.... What we have to create is a civil union law. That way they are legally covered.” In the past Pope Francis has asked parents not to shun children who have same-sex attraction. With regard to civil unions, he had taken a similar stand as an archbishop in Argentina. His remarks change nothing of Catholic Church teaching: We still hold that the sacrament of matrimony requires one man and one woman. As one commentator noted, the pope was trying to effect a change in tone, not in policy. Actually, it fits the dream of his encyclical on unity.

Saint Paul describes the unity among his new Christian brothers and sisters in today’s reading from the First Letter to the Thessalonians. He writes with two companions, “you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all the believers” in other places. Paul noted this growing unity around Christ.

According to Acts of the Apostles, Paul had traveled to Thessaloniki to proclaim Christ to the local Jewish and Gentile populations. But when he began winning converts, some of those who rebuffed his message formed a mob “and set the city in turmoil.” The crowd hauled some of the new Christians before the magistrates, who took a payment from them and let them go. Paul escaped the city during the night. The road to unity hit the bump of conflict.

One way we can respond to Pope Francis’s encyclical is to reflect on the ways we may contribute to conflict. Sometimes we don’t even intend to create division, but our privileges in society and in family life cause us to pursue our satisfaction, rather than the common good. For Paul, the polestar is “to serve the living and true God and to await his Son in heaven.” If we find satisfaction in Christ, we will seek less satisfaction for ourselves. That will open our hearts to enjoy the company of those who are not like us, but are brothers and sisters all.

Sunday, October 25, 2020