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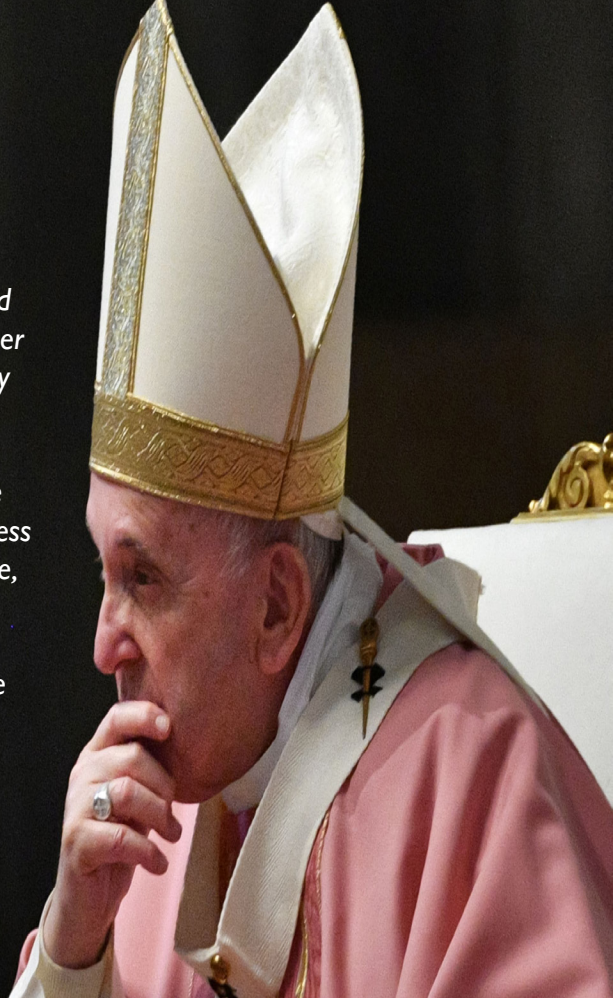
The Precious Blood Family




***Fratelli Tutti: We Are Blood
Sisters and Brothers in the
Blood of Christ***

**ENCYCLICAL OF
POPE FRANCIS**

“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.’ In his simple and direct way, St. 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.”
Fratelli tutti (No. 1)



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FROM THE EDITOR

4. *We are a People of the New Covenant Sealed Through the Blood of Christ*

by Jerome A. Hologa

MAGISTERIUM

5-6 *“Dark Clouds Over a Closed World”*

by Fr. John Colacino, C.P.P.S.

7-8 *Humanity is Spelled “F-r-a-t-e-r-n-i-t-y”*

by Ada Prisco

USC AND OUR HISTORY

9-10 *Gaspar the Peacemaker*

by Fr. Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

11-12 *No Blood, No Life*

by Fr. Joshua Lobo

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

13-16 *The Human Dignity*

by Fr. Paul Ndigi, C.P.P.S.

18-19 *Euthanasia: Killing is Not Neutral*

by Alex Schadenberg

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

20-21 *A Christianity That Heals*

by Bradley Black

22-23 *The Unexpected Fast*

by Mary Benincasa

YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH

26-27 *St. Joseph: Our Emergency in this Pandemic*

by Jerome A. Hologa



We are a People of the New Covenant Sealed Through the Blood of Christ

As we begin reflecting on the encyclical, *Fratelli tutti* with the flavour of the spirituality of the Precious Blood, let the words of Paul guide us, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the Blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it” (Eph 2:13-16).

With these words, Paul tells us that we are a new people of the New Covenant, sealed in the Blood of Christ. For in his act of self-sacrifice and shedding of blood is the bond which makes us blood brothers and sisters. The Blood of Christ, therefore, is both the sign of unity and bond of charity of redeemed humanity, and this is the vision and hope of universal fraternity Pope Francis is invoking in his encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*. For once we see each other as blood sisters and brothers in the Blood of Christ, then it doesn’t matter whether we come from different families, communities, cultures, or nations — we are a single

human family.

Yet, as Pope Francis points out in the first chapter of the encyclical, our world is still covered by dark clouds because we have been unfaithful to our bond. And so we have partaken in the scourging, crowning with thorns, humiliation, and crucifixion of our brothers and sisters. Even should we share our lives to the point of giving away our own flesh and blood in sacrifice like our Lord did, we are still spilling blood that is his first of all. In a world where in the dollar we trust, the human person is no longer the center of every initiative or development serving the human person, but a disposable object, needed when useful or productive but discarded when no longer producing. Short-term economic gain is preferred over long-term ruin of the environment with little or no regard for future generations. We prey on the vulnerable by offering them much needed help, only to find themselves later entangled by perpetual debt. Exploitation disguised as generosity. The exclusive club of the powerful gets smaller and smaller; studies show the world’s 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 percent of the Earth’s population. Big corporations have become bigger than governments and countries, operating in a space that is increasingly disconnected from human and environmental concerns.

As St. Gaspar was called forth to witness the Blood of Christ during a time of great crisis and corruption, our calling is now.



“Dark Clouds Over a Closed World”

By Fr. John Colacino

The prefect of the Vatican congregation responsible for overseeing the church’s religious communities, João Braz Cardinal De Aviz, recently asked members of the various institutes to place Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, “at the centre of your life, formation and mission.”

Given their charism of reconciliation and communion, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood would find the prefect’s request a welcome challenge. Therefore, I am beginning a series of articles that will comment on the papal document, chapter by chapter, in light of the spirituality of the Precious Blood—the Blood that draws all people near (cf. Eph. 2:13).

One thing to note, however, about *Fratelli Tutti* is its length and complexity, making it impossible to summarize in a venue such as this or to do justice to its many themes. I invite you therefore to make an effort to read the chapter under consideration patiently and reflectively. The encyclical can be found at the Vatican website (www.vatican.va) while the American bishops have published an overview under the “resources” page at <https://www.usccb.org/fratelli-tutti>. What we will attempt in these pages is a broad and necessarily selective commentary that will hopefully

resonate with those who seek to live and embody the charism and spirituality of the Precious Blood in their respective states of life.

Chapter 1 is entitled “Dark Clouds Over a Closed World.” Here Pope Francis provides an overall assessment of a world challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic which has exacerbated already existing tendencies of mutual isolation among the various sectors of the globe. He offers as an antidote “acknowledging the dignity of each human person” and the “rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity” (no. 8).

A central motif when eyeing the present situation is Francis’ metaphor of “walls”—walls “erected for self-preservation” creating a dichotomized worldview where “us” and “them” are sharply delineated. In closing oneself off to “the other” the pope sees many people succumbing to “the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people. And those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have built” (no. 27).

The New Testament knows this metaphor as well. Paul, in the passage from Ephesians mentioned above, spoke of dividing walls separating the divisions of his own society: what he would elsewhere name as those existing between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, civilized and those judged to be cultural outliers (cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). But the

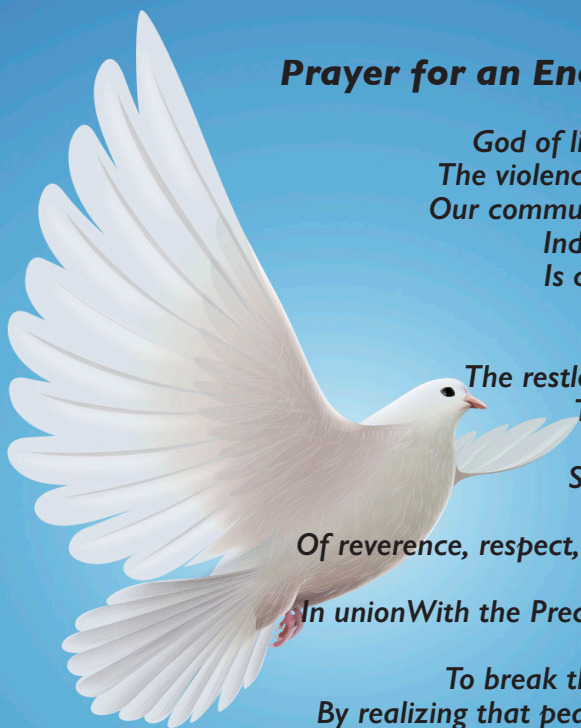
Prayer for an End to Violence

*God of life, Source of hope,
The violence within our world,
Our communities, our families,
Indeed our very selves
Is destroying creation.*

*Make still
The restless spirit within me
That is self-seeking.*

*Stir within my heart
A renewed spirit
Of reverence, respect, and reconciliation.*

*In union With the Precious Blood of Jesus
Give me strength
To break the cycle of violence
By realizing that peace begins with me.
Amen.*



immediate context of the passage from Ephesians is the literal wall in the Jerusalem temple that marked off the sections where only Jews could enter and those that Gentiles were forbidden to transgress—under pain of death. In other words, access to the Divine was strictly cordoned off and access limited. But then, says Paul, access was restored to all people “by the blood of Christ” whereby one new humanity” has been created through the cross as the agent “putting to death their hostility” (cf. Eph. 2:14-18).

So as Pope Francis calls us to rediscover we are “all brothers and

sisters” and challenges us on every front to make a renewed “fraternity” the outcome of such rediscovery, we see how this has already been achieved by the work of Christ. It remains for his followers to continue border-crossing, wall-demolishing and barrier-breaking to extend his achievement into every corner of human life and concern.

A central motif when eyeing the present situation is Francis’ metaphor of “walls”—walls “erected for self-preservation” creating a dichotomized worldview where “us” and “them” are sharply delineated.

Fratelli tutti

**Humanity is
Spelled “F-r-a-t-
e-r-n-i-t-y”**

By Ada Prisco

In every work the heart of a thought, of a special notion of life beats. In particular, by reading a religious document, one comes into contact with a way of conceiving the divine, and conversely, the human as well. The philosophies of the time are reflected even in the writings of the Catholic magisterium. On several occasions, in fact, with regard to Pope Francis, commentators have spoken of his promotion of “humanism” or a “new humanism” and they have not always done so positively, asserting that this concept would be too weak to the detriment of the Gospel’s more specific and exclusive idea of humanity.

Nobody excluded

In the central body of *Fratelli tutti*, more than in the rest of the letter, it is possible to note how in the Pope’s thought humanism is never detached from Christian discourse, which is presented with pastoral urgency on the part of those who announce it. Since this may not always be so explicit, perhaps it is good to bring it out more clearly. Francis never excludes himself from any discourse; he is always totally involved in the subject he deals with. And he fully assumes

all the presuppositions and specific characteristics of Jesus the good shepherd or, even better, Jesus the “Samaritan” par excellence. Precisely this hinge, the fact of centering himself on Christ, makes possible broadening the radius of this compass with the ardor of an evangelical mission. So from the point of view of the good shepherd, no one is excluded from the compassionate attention that gathers the lambs in his arms, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care (Is 40:11). Nor the Samaritan who stopped to help the unfortunate without allowing prejudices to prevail but gave instead absolute priority to the rescue. In that man lying on the ground he saw exactly one man, and, at the same time, helped the whole of humanity because, should there have been any other individual, his intervention would not have changed. Francis’ emphasis on humanism appears to be aimed above all at enhancing this aspect.

To be, not to be, who to be?

Then there is the question of whether Francis concedes too much space to humanism compared to what he reserves for the specifically Christian. Given that we can choose

how better to present our Christian identity, the pope’s offering the parable of the good Samaritan is interesting. Those who did not stop to help the unfortunate man, while apparently committed to a religious point of view, allowed an identity or role to prevail thereby giving precedence to a function they were called to perform. This was the reason for their haste. They failed to serve humanity, preferring to go straight ahead and fulfill a formal role.

This same risk is lurking within all of us. Not only concern our work, but also interpersonal relationships, even family ones. Even if we are performing a service that is required of us, it may appear impeccable, but it may well consign us to individualism and close us in solitude. There is no road to communion that ignores humanity itself. The profoundly human love of which the encyclical speaks is the only one capable of valuing everyone because it puts into circulation a power that makes one experience how in giving one receives and that indeed it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

A world of solidarity and sharing

Solidarity with humanity welcomed “as is,” creates bonds which, far from threatening freedom, strengthens it in relation to our concept of sharing. Rediscovered as a spirituality that distinguishes us as Christians, it brings us closer to the poor in the awareness that we are all equally poor and can enrich ourselves equally by opening ourselves to God-

made-human, who comes to meet each one of us in the face of a brother or sister whom we meet along the way. It is no coincidence that in the Gospel passage the one who provided aid is a Samaritan, someone who more than others could have experienced marginalization, belonging as he did to a minority. We can imagine how he drew a lesson from his own suffering enabling him to make a sacrifice which became a fraternal bond of sharing.

Approaching humanity from this angle involves a revision of many borders, internal and external to the person. It questions the barriers of prejudice, of belonging, but also the frontiers that often determine a person’s destiny. Migrants are well aware that living in a dangerous corner of the planet can substantially change the course of a life. But have we not all been predestined to be adopted children of God through Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:5)? In the presence of God there is no stranger or guest, but do we reflect this with our life, with our policies and economies?

Since God’s care looks to the whole world and the whole world is his work, every Christian must feel the urge to feel as his own the same drive to value differences in a spirit of communion. The fruitful exchanges between East and West, the mutual and fruitful help between the global North and South, is not optional -- it is the substance Christianity. Every Christian in his or her own small way is either a missionary or not a Christian at all.

Gaspar the Peacemaker

By Fr. Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

One of the more prominent and memorable chapters in the life of St. Gaspar is his ministry with the brigands in the Papal States south of Rome. Gaspar and his Missionaries took a bold and courageous step in order to bring peace to a very troubled area. It remains a powerful example of Gaspar's ministry of reconciliation motivated by the power of the Blood of Jesus.

Gaspar's concern for reconciliation and peacemaking was not confined to this dramatic period of his life, however. The missions he and other Missionaries conducted also emphasized reconciliation, as recorded by Biagio Valentini, Gaspar's spiritual director for more than fifteen years and Gaspar's successor as superior of the Congregation, and the Venerable John Merlini his friend and the third moderator general of the CPPS. Not long after Gaspar's death, both of them were invited to give testimony in the canonical process for the beatification and canonization of Gaspar. Their testimony is an invaluable source for much of what we know of our founder's life and work.

Merlini notes that a feature of the mission was reconciliation and establishing peace. He describes a ritual for peacemaking: "It consisted in having the priests come onto the platform two by two where they

kissed the wounds of the Crucified Lord, while he and his companions kissed the feet of the priests. Sometimes, he would have two of his companions kiss the feet of the priests while he held the Crucifix. The priests then stepped off the platform, wearing their choir garb and the solemn stole or with surplice and stole. Where there were few priests, he would substitute with the men of the various confraternities that had assumed the task of assisting at the Mission. While all that was going on, he urged the people to exclaim: "Peace with God, peace with everyone, long live peace." Furthermore, he himself or others would announce the selection of peacemakers, both men and women, whose responsibility it was to bring about reconciliation wherever there was need".

What is noteworthy here is that Gaspar, always concerned that the fruits of the mission would endure, would choose peacemakers from among those making the mission to continue the work of reconciliation that had begun during that spiritual exercise. I have not found a description of the process for selecting the peacemakers, but Gaspar may well have consulted the clergy and lay people of the place in making his choice. Gaspar was also known to be perceptive of the gifts of others and rather forceful in inviting them to use these gifts in ministry.

I have regrettably not found any more details about how these peacemakers were to carry out

“Gaspar, always concerned that the fruits of the mission would endure, would choose peacemakers from among those making the mission to continue the work of reconciliation”

the ministry of reconciliation. Gaspar and the other Missionaries did, of course, establish associations or sodalities of the laity and clergy in order that the good work begun in the missions might continue to be fruitful. Perhaps Gaspar encouraged the peacemakers to form a similar organization. Ever a man to look to detail, Gaspar would, I suspect, give the peacemakers some rather specific instructions to carry out their ministry.

Another significant feature of the mission that took place on the final day was the “sermon of reminders.” Prior to the sermon, the people were asked to bring “all evil books that were to be burned, also playing cards and other dangerous articles, including forbidden weapons” and to surrender them to the missionaries. The books and cards would be burned and the weapons smashed to bits, with the metal then sold and “the money used to buy wax for candles or something else in honor of the most holy Mary.” It seems that Gaspar anticipated contemporary gun turn-in programs nearly two hundred years ago! (It appears that at some point in our history playing cards were judged to be less evil, given the prominence of pinochle and other card games in C.P.P.S. history here in North America.)

Merlini and Valentini describe a number of occasions in which public and dramatic reconciliations took place during missions conducted by our founder. One striking example (told to Valentini by Innocenzo Betti, one of the first companions

of Gaspar) involved a very sick man whom Gaspar was trying to convince of the need for repentance and reconciliation. The man was not convinced of the urgency of his situation, so Gaspar resorted to more dramatic means: Realizing that his words were being ignored and wanting nevertheless at any cost to save that soul, the Servant of God again took out his discipline and while holding the Crucifix aloft in his other hand, he proceeded with the thrashing on his back. The dying man was so moved that with great compunction he began making his confession. Since he had borne a long-seated interior hatred for one of his neighbors, he then shouted out his pardon and sought immediate reconciliation with him. Shortly after that, the man died tranquilly, fortified with the other sacraments.

From these few examples it is clear that reconciliation was a very important element in Gaspar’s ministry, especially in the missions. Not only did he encourage and invite people to be reconciled during the mission, but he also provided a means of continuing the ministry of reconciliation by the peacemakers he appointed.

We Missionaries of the Precious Blood have been sharpening our focus on reconciliation as a core element of our congregational charism. Certainly Gaspar must be pleased that we are, in a sense, rediscovering a dimension of ministry that was of such great importance to him.



No Blood, No Life

By Fr. Joshua Lobo

The shedding of blood has long been associated with mercy and the forgiveness of sins. We see this exemplified in the people of Israel who offered up to God the sacrifice of lambs and goats in atonement for their sins. At the highpoint of their temple sacrifice, the people of Israel were sacrificing animals in the hundreds of thousands; it has been said that their priests in the temple were wading in the blood of animals. It is important to remember that in requesting the sacrifice of animals, God is working to heal the human heart. The natural tendency for humans is to forget about God, to put their own needs and priorities above him. However, the sacrifice of the choicest animals, the first fruits of their labour, reminds the people of Israel that their relationship with God is their top priority. Ritual sacrifice was one way that God taught Israel to be faithful to Him, to love Him above all things, to prioritize love of God over self-love. Therefore, ritual animal

sacrifice is not so much for God's sake as it is for humankind's. It is an act of God's mercy towards his people, to help heal their woundedness. Therefore, the shedding of the blood of a sacrificial victim has a twofold effect, the forgiveness of sins and the healing of the human heart.

For Christians, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the establishment of His Church put an end to continual animal sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Christ Himself tells us at the last supper, (words that are repeated at every Mass) that His blood will be poured out for us and for the forgiveness of sins. His is the one and eternal sacrifice. So precious is His blood that even one drop shed for us would have been enough to atone for the sins of every human who has or ever will live. The book of Hebrews, sometimes affectionately called the letter of the precious blood, beautifully reveals the power of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Christ entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! (Hebrews 9:12-14)

The power of Christ's sacrifice is incredible. All previous sacrifices of God's people point towards and find their fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. His sacrifice makes all the previous sacrifices of the old covenant pleasing in the eyes of God. What is the essence of Christ's sacrifice? The Lord Jesus' sacrifice is mercy and love personified. In His love for humanity and in the greatest act of mercy, He shed every last drop of His blood. The blood of Christ that was shed during His sacrifice on the Cross is therefore a tangible sacrament and sign of God's mercy and love; it can have a powerful effect within us if we allow it. Just as the sacrifices of the old covenant were meant to

heal and sanctify Israel, receiving the blood of Christ, the blood of the new and eternal covenant is meant to make us holy. When we receive the Eucharist, we receive the blood of Christ. Christ's blood enters our body and the blood that was a sign of mercy for us, that obtained salvation for us, that was shed for us, now courses through our veins. Within us, it has the power to subdue our unruly passions, free us from sinful inclinations and vice and strengthen us in virtue. In a word, it has the power to give us true life. This is why the Son of God became human: "I came that they may have life and have it in abundance." (John 10:10) True life comes from a relationship with God. Without blood, we have no life within us, without Christ's blood coursing through our veins, this is even more true. "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life within you" (John 6:53). Therefore, we must honour Our Lord's most precious blood in the Eucharist; it is the same blood which flowed from His Sacred Heart as a fountain of mercy, the blood which purifies our hearts and reorients them towards God, the most precious blood which saves us.

"Without blood, we have no life within us, without Christ's blood coursing through our veins, this is even more true. "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life within you" (John 6:53)."



The Human Dignity

By Fr. Paul Ndigi, C.P.P.S.

What is humankind that you are mindful of them? (Ps. 8). That is the existential question we too ask ourselves when we reflect on our lives, and when we realize our limits. Those limits, specific to every already-fragile and short-lived person, is a sign that we will always need “the other.” That is the existential question we too ask ourselves when we reflect on our lives, and when we realize our limits. Those limits, specific to every already-fragile and short-lived person, is a sign that we will always need “the other.” A human person is the only being who is both an object and a subject of study. The reflections that gravitate around human identity have no boundaries.

To answer the question, What is humankind? philosophers—ancient and modern—have committed themselves to finding an answer.

For Aristotle, human beings are “rational animals.” For Thomas Hobbes humans are “wolves toward other humans.” For Blaise Pascal we are “a thinking reed.” If in the past this kind of reflection was focused on human identity, lately the dispute has turned to the very reasons for our existence. We ask ourselves whether other humans should be welcomed or not; whether to provide medical treatment or not; whether we should still be left alive in spite of acute suffering? Beyond this, we ask ourselves another question: Why and for whom do humans live?

Given that life is the greatest good to which every living thing clings, it seems humans ought to possess an awareness that life must be defended and honored from conception to the last breath. Sometimes, however, it seems that human beings live *continues on page 16...*



ENCYCLICAL LETTER
FRATELLI TUTTI
Of the Holy Father Francis
On fraternity and social friendship

WHAT IS IT?



The third encyclical of Pope Francis, after *Lumen fidei* (2013) and *Laudato si'* (2015).



It was signed on October 3, 2020, in Assisi, Italy.

ON WHAT IS IT BASED?



- ▶ Questions about fraternity and social friendship that have concerned the Pope in recent years.
- ▶ Themes put forward in the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, which the Pope signed jointly with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in February 2019.

WHAT DOES IT PROPOSE?



- ▶ It is a social encyclical dedicated to fraternity and social friendship.
- ▶ It treats the universal dimension of the doctrine of fraternal love.
- ▶ Its aim is to put forth a new vision of fraternity and social friendship.]
- ▶ It encourages us to dream as a single human family and as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh.

TO WHOM IS IT ADDRESSED?



To all persons who will accept this reflection an invitation to dialogue.

WHERE DOES THE TITLE COME FROM?



- ▶ *Fratelli tutti* is an expression of Saint Francis of Assisi (Admonitions, 6, 1).
- ▶ The saint used the expression to propose a way of life marked by the flavor of the Gospel.
- ▶ Saint Francis invites all men and women to a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance.

HOW IS THE ENCYCLICAL ORGANIZED?

- ▶ *Fratelli tutti* consists of a general introduction and 8 chapters.

Introduction

Chapter I: DARK CLOUDS OVER A CLOSED WORLD

Chapter II: A STRANGER ON THE ROAD

Chapter III: ENVISAGING AND ENGENDERING AN OPEN WORLD

Chapter IV: A HEART OPEN TO THE WHOLE WORLD

Chapter V: A BETTER KIND OF POLITICS

Chapter VI: DIALOGUE AND FRIENDSHIP IN SOCIETY

Chapter VII: PATHS OF RENEWED ENCOUNTER



ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN PRAYER

“Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty, reflected in all the peoples of the earth, so that we may discover a new that all are important and all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves.”

Amén

DARK CLOUDS OVER A CLOSED WORLD



Pope Francis observes trends in our world that hinder the development of universal fraternity.

“Globalized society makes us neighbors, but it does not make us brothers and sisters.”

IN WHAT WAYS DO WE OBSERVE THE DARK CLOUDS OVER A CLOSED WORLD?

- ▶ The despair and discouragement that are widespread in society
- ▶ The polarization that impedes dialogue and living together
- ▶ The persons who are considered easily “sacrificed” and discarded.
- ▶ The inequality of rights and the new forms of slavery.
- ▶ The moral deterioration and the weakening of spiritual values



TODAY WE WITNESS THE MANIPULATION OF GREAT WORDS, SUCH AS:

**LIBERTY JUSTICE
DEMOCRACY UNITY**

IN THE FACE OF THESE CHALLENGES, *FRATELLI TUTTI* INSISTS THAT

“The road we must travel is that of closeness; it is the culture of encounter”



God continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness.



Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, has to be realized each and every day.



Hope looks beyond any personal convenience that limits our horizon, and it opens us up to grand ideals.

to assert themselves, to show off what we possess more than what we are. There are those who live to gain approval, have privileges and therefore to dominate. And as long as you are well, everything is fine, but a small imbalance is enough for moods to change and means are suddenly sought to get rid of us. In order not to suffer, some choose death for themselves or their loved ones. The magisterium of the Church has not failed to condemn such practices that offend the dignity of life. Pope St. John Paul II described contempt for the person as a “culture of death” while Pope Francis speaks of a “culture of waste”.

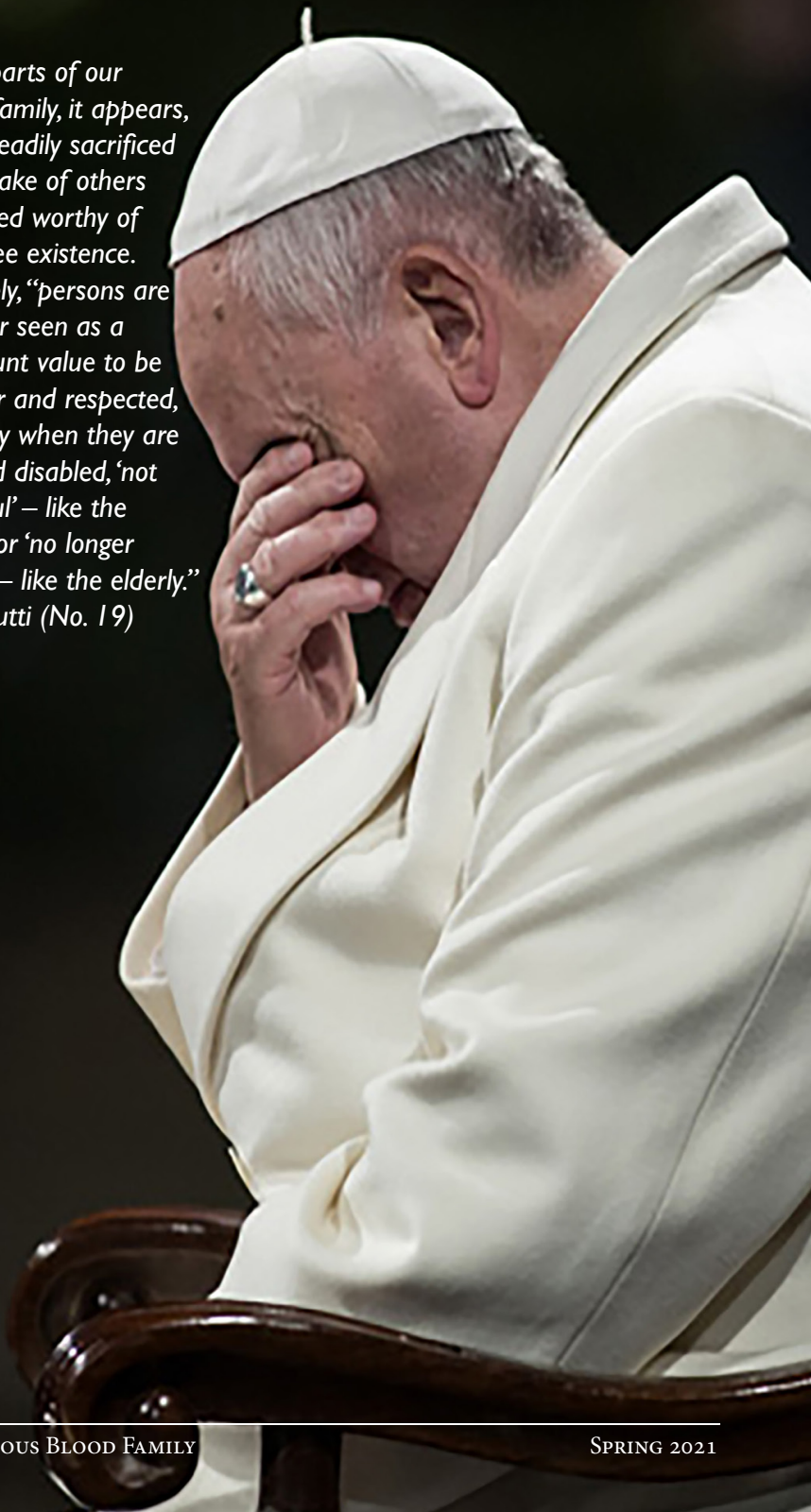
And while we might hear about human dignity and respect for humanity, that same dignity and respect are often trampled on at the same time. Human beings, for example, reduced to slavery, children used like toys. Do the elderly or the sick cease to be human persons with all the dignity that is proper to them because are in a bad condition? The culture of rejection and death (euthanasia and assisted suicide)—although legitimized by some nations—cannot be considered a solution. Implementing these practices leads to saying that the dignity of the human person is reduced to psychosomatic health only. This cannot be the only criterion for evaluating human life; it would inexorably nullify human integrity. Descartes’ dictum *cogito ergo sum* (I think and therefore I am) must be

overcome with courage for if I don’t cogitare, ergo non sum?

In a dispute between Jesus and the Sadducees regarding repudiation of a spouse, the Master replied that Moses granted it because of the hardness of their hearts but in the beginning this was not the case. Hence the famous statement by Jean Jacques Rousseau taken from the *Social Contract*: “The human being is born good and society corrupts him.” In fact, this so-called “civil” society modifies the character of the human, oppresses it, and inevitably conditions it. Such conditioning (despite humans being “rational”) is due to the tendency to homologate (do as others do).

Our age, one of perpetual change, relentlessly faces numerous interferences. But can a mutation that undermines human dignity truly make for growth in a society? Can such a society really be a “thinking” one? Perhaps life is worth nothing to some, but can anything really be worth more than life, especially human life? If out of all mammals, human are by nature the only ones who take care of their fellow humans without a time limit, where then does the idea of eliminating our neighbor arise? How beautiful it would be to reread the parable of the good Samaritan! Care of the “other” is the first responsibility that we must experience when close to vulnerable people. And Jesus will always say to us: “Go and do the same” (Lk 10, 37).

“Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, ‘persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly.” Fratelli tutti (No. 19)





EUTHANASIA

Killing is Not Neutral

By Alex Schadenberg

Canada just completed a roller-coaster euthanasia debate ending with the expansion of the law to include people who are not terminally ill, who are incompetent but still approved to die, and people with mental illness alone. (The government stayed euthanasia for mental illness for two years as they devised the protocols for killing) Canada legalized euthanasia and assisted suicide in June 2016 under the guise of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD). The original law obligated the government to do a five-year review of the law beginning in June 2020, yet this government decided to expand the euthanasia law without first reviewing it.

MAiD is promoted based on “freedom” and “autonomy.” You know how if something is said often enough that people begin to believe it. It is the same for euthanasia and assisted suicide. **We are told it is all about freedom and autonomy, but in reality the law does not create any new freedoms and it is not about autonomy. The law gives doctors and nurse practitioners the right in law to cause the death of their patients by lethal injection.** The law requires a person to request death, but the decision to to cause death is

made by the medical practitioner; it is done, moreover, by the medical practitioner and it is reported by the same practitioner. How can acts of freedom or autonomy be defined by what one person does to kill me?

Suicide is an act of self-killing. It is a grievous act that affects family members, friends and others. To this day I mourn the death by suicide of a friend from more than 30 years ago. Suicide is often related to depression, mental illness or situations in which a person believes they have no other choice. Suicide is always a tragedy; nonetheless, euthanasia is promoted as a decision that I make for myself, but clearly that is not the case. In reality, euthanasia is an act of homicide whereby the medical professional agrees and then intentionally causes my death usually by lethal injection. Assisted suicide is supposed to be with the direct involvement of the person in question with assistance by someone knowingly prescribing lethal drugs. Therefore euthanasia is an act of killing another person whereby that person agrees to be killed and assisted suicide is involvement in the killing another person.

In any case, killing is not neutral. Euthanasia and assisted suicide, in the spiritual realm, have permanent

consequences. We understand that there are times when a person is so distraught or experiencing such deep mental anguish or depression that they are asking for something that they would never otherwise request; nonetheless, euthanasia, by definition, is an act that is done only after a competent person has asked to die. After speaking at a Catholic event about euthanasia, a woman approached me to tell me that she supported euthanasia based on the terrible death that her mother experienced. I responded with sorrow that her mother suffered, but I asked her if she believed that killing another human being is wrong. She felt that there should be exceptions to killing. I then responded by asking her if there were spiritual effects on the soul of the doctor who would cause the death by lethal injection. She thought about it and responded that she could understand how the act of euthanasia affects the person who died spiritually, but also the person who caused the death.

I then spoke to her about the challenge we face as Christians to love one another and share ourselves and our hope with others, especially as they are facing life-ending or chronic medical conditions. We are all human and we all experience depression, feelings of loneliness and loss of hope or purpose and we all fear suffering. These are normal human feelings and these are the same feelings that lead a person to seek death by euthanasia. It is our human reality that moves us to

respond to human suffering. Catholics are sometimes accused of wanting people to suffer. This is a ridiculous accusation simply because we oppose killing; we are seen as unwilling to end suffering.

God made us as a communal being. We need to be with others and we need to care for each other. When we are lonely, feeling a loss of hope or purpose and “suffering alone” we may become open to euthanasia. But as people of faith we are called to share our hope with others, to help others find purpose in their life, to be a listening ear and a caring heart. We are all called to be present to others in their time of need.

It is tragic when someone dies by euthanasia. The question is, can we love and care for our people enough to prevent this outcome? The Compassionate Community Care charity (compassionatecommunitycare.org) has created a training program for visiting with elderly people who are lonely and who feel that their life lacks purpose or meaning. By being with others in their time of need, and sharing hope, we can truly make a difference in the lives of others. Considering that many faithful Catholics are older and due to life circumstances, are now living alone and lack significant community support, we are challenged to recognize the importance of caring for our people.

A Christianity That Heals

By Bradley Black



The mark of being Christian is to love, to give oneself for the sake of another. We pour out our lives for the redemption and healing of the world as instruments of the redeeming power of Christ. The other mark we bear is that of sin. So while growing in charity we also grow in humility. This process of redemption moves us away from our own self-interest to the world's and the community's interest, and this growth simultaneously heals and strengthens our wounded sinful nature. Although we might think of ourselves in a kind of game, trying to score points to get to heaven, what I'd like to argue in this short essay is that the true nature of the church is to heal us and restore us to spiritual health, healthy in our relationship with God, our neighbour and oneself.

In the history of Catholicism the working out of the story of sin and redemption has taken many roads. In part due to the influence of Constantine, a predominant narrative was one of justice with analogies to court systems. To put it very simply

the story goes like this: Through sin we break God's laws and justice is demanded to repair this disorder; Christ's death makes satisfaction to God's justice and through baptism and the sacraments the merits of Christ are applied and the injustice is rectified.

Yet, there is simultaneously another story, one more prevalent in Orthodox Christianity and found frequently in the church fathers. This is a story of healing, where sin is not a legal offense but a symptom of sickness, sickness that needs therapy, something which is a healing technique and procedure. St John Chrysostom in his Letter to Theodore After His Fall, paints a picture of God as a healer:

Even when we fall into the very extremity of madness, God says and does everything, not to avenge Himself on account of our former deeds; but because He wishes to release us from our disorder. For as the best physicians bring back those who are far gone in sickness with careful treatment to a state of health: even so God conducts to virtue those who are much depraved, not with great severity, but gently and gradually,

and supporting them on every side, so that the separation may not become greater, nor the error more prolonged.

In this view sin is not seen to be a legal or social injustice, but rather a disorder of the soul.

If we take this view how might it change our picture of the Christian life? In the Christian doctrine of original sin there are three realms of disorder. First, the original harmony between humanity and God is broken; secondly the relationship of human being to one another is troubled, and finally the relationship we have with ourselves is also broken. In our relationship with God we no longer want what God wants, we defy God in a weak attempt at “freedom.” Instead of a relationship of love we have one of defiance. We see disorder in our relationships, for example, in conflict between married people, in the fighting between siblings, in the abuses of shepherds and leaders. Though we are made to give ourselves to each other, sin leads us to use one another. Finally, in our relationship with ourselves we feel conflict between our reason and our passion. “I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:23). None of this is legal language but the language of brokenness, of sickness.

The church therefore offers us, not legal representation before a judge, but through prayer and the sacraments the healing medicine of Christ. Prayer,

turning to God, heals our relationship with him and we can begin to trust his love rather than run from it. The church leads us to relational healing by making the sacraments communal in nature. We are asked to confess our sins to a priest, weddings require witnesses, and Mass takes place in the communion of saints. Finally, the liturgical and sacramental words offer healing for our inner selves. Right belief begins to heal our minds of the disordered thinking due to the effects of original sin. In each of these places of darkness the Divine Physician brings light.

But what about repentance? If we are sick, why is it so important that we repent? Even in Orthodox theology we are called to repentance, not to mention in Scripture, the church fathers, and the liturgical language of the church. To this I would answer that unless we admit we are sick we cannot be healed. We come to the physician not to turn ourselves in but to receive the treatment we so desperately need. As with most things in Christian life, we need to keep a perspective that allows for two things at once -- in this case, judgement and healing. God is judge and healer. We are sinners and sick. However, in our life of prayer, study and community we should identify more as sick pilgrims rather than prisoners in the docket. We are made to be well, and we must submit to the Physician, admitting our unwellness. This humble admission and trust in his goodness, and his ability to make us well, is the beginning of our healing.



The Unexpected Fast

By Mary Benincasa

“We cannot do without the Eucharist, for it is God’s memorial. And it heals our wounded memory.” (Pope Francis)



In March 2020, when churches closed their doors due to a rapidly spreading virus, the Catholic community was taken by surprise. A fast from the Eucharist? Unheard of! For how long? Some voiced their unease at having their rights restricted, but most resigned themselves to the government’s lockdown order. We found ourselves in the midst of the Lenten and Easter seasons with no Mass, no Eucharist and no Sunday community.

At first this seemed unprecedented. Then, slowly, stories began circulating about various pandemics and contagions recorded in history that required people to isolate from others in order to reduce the death toll. We heard that churches were also shut down during the 1918 flu pandemic. Those clergy and congregants who refused to abide by the order witnessed an alarming number of deaths among their brothers and sisters.

As Catholics, we are aware of another occasion, apart from pandemics, in which Mass and the Eucharist are not available to the

faithful. Each year in fact, Catholics experience such a fast during the Sacred Triduum, which begins at sundown on Holy Thursday and reaches its summit with the Easter Vigil.

During these three days, we are immersed in one continuous liturgy beginning with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday and culminating with the final blessing at the Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord at the Easter Vigil. On Good Friday, we remember that Christ shed his Precious Blood for our redemption and attend a Liturgy of the Word with the distribution of Communion consecrated the night before. On Holy Saturday we wait in anticipation for our sacramental life to be renewed in the Risen Lord and there is no Mass or Eucharist available to us until day is done and we proclaim “Christ is risen! Alleluia!”

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in a book he wrote entitled *Behold the Pierced One*, tells us that the early Church fasted from the Eucharist both on Good Friday as well as Holy

Saturday as “a particularly profound way of sharing in the Lord’s Passion.”

Have we experienced this unexpected pandemic fast as a “way of sharing in the Lord’s Passion”? Certainly, we have witnessed either first-hand or through news reports the deep pain and grief this virus has caused in the lives of many through physical, mental and spiritual illness. Many of us know someone who has suffered or died because of the coronavirus.

Pope Benedict states that a spiritual fast “can be a vehicle of love.” Of course, when he wrote this in 1986, he was not writing about pandemic lockdowns, but what he did say can be applied to our present situation.

How has our participation in a fast from Mass or from Eucharist during this pandemic been “a vehicle of love”? To begin with, our “yes” in cooperating with this pandemic fast or our “yes” to abstaining from extended family meals and other gatherings and celebrations have signalled our willingness to slow down the spread of the virus and thus protect the most vulnerable members of our communities.

“Yes” has been the loving response of priests and parish staff who have utilized the technical tools at hand, providing online Mass and inspirational messages for parishioners and to inquire about the needs of those living alone.

“Yes” has been the loving response of family members and friends who have gathered online or checked in

with each other by phone or social media. It has been in the effort made by people wearing masks and social distancing.

“Yes” has been the loving response of those parents who have sat down with their children navigating at-home learning, as well as teachers kindly preparing lessons using virtual programs they may never have used before.

“Yes” has been the loving response of governments offering emergency relief for those in need and protective vaccines for everyone. It has also been echoed in the way these efforts have been supported and affirmed by many who have seen in the government’s actions an acceptance of responsibility for the common good.

We have now marked an entire year of living through a pandemic and have made it to the beginning of another Easter – the holy season of redemption, hope, healing and new life. We hear, “Christ is risen indeed and that death does not have the final word.” Our faith, and our resounding “yes” to the life God desires for us in communion with Him will continue to bear fruit in the love we have for God and neighbour.

In time, churches will be fully opened, Mass celebrated and Eucharist received without pandemic restrictions and ministries completely restored, and we will move forward in thanksgiving as the Body of Christ -- a transformed people eager to bring the Good News of God’s abiding love and mercy everywhere.



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Renew the Spirit of Your Minds

Many times, from the eternal truths and from the power of the divine word, we look into ourselves and we are filled with compunction. What do we do then? We invoke the saints etc., we promise to change etc., but experience teaches us that once that fervor of compunction is passed, we go back to what we were before. Why that? Because in that new life that is begun, lacking is that real spirit. Like a lamp, it is simply lacking in oil etc.

No real method is established, not even variations. The spirit of the mind is simply not activated etc. One must observe order so as to achieve the end proposed, and, the means are to be set up. So, the renewal that must take place in us must not be like the changes we undergo with the change of seasons that simply go by, for example, we make a change in our way of dress; but, we are to maintain the same method, (make an adjustment in it, etc.), and that change must be an intrinsic one of spirit, that is to say, a complete change of governing, a change of heart.

- St. Gaspar del Bufalo

ST. JOSEPH

Our Emergency in this Pandemic

Emergency



By Jerome Hologa

St. Joseph is the first saint I knew because he is the patron saint of my home parish. As you would expect, he is my favourite saint and a model. For a man who is talked very little in the gospels, his name is everywhere and he commands extraordinary reverence. He is the patron saint of the Universal Church and of many countries, one of them being Canada. He is also the patron of many causes such as chastity, marriage, families, a good death, orphans, engineers, refugees, carpenters and many more. Countless places and churches all over the world are named after St. Joseph. Many religious institutes and lay associations are inspired by his charisma. Many saints and spiritual reformers took him as their spiritual father. They spoke and wrote about him very fondly. Our founder St. Gaspar del Bufalo described St. Joseph as the glorious patriarch who participated uniquely in the work of redemption. He says, “Jesus redeemed humankind by learning obedience in the world, detachment from sensuous things, and to seek deeply the reconciliation of humanity to God.

Joseph, then, is the great Patriarch of the divine mysteries as Jesus shows obedience toward him.”

As we struggle mightily with the pandemic, it is a blessed coincidence for the Church to celebrate a special year dedicated to St. Joseph. If we are looking to hope again, then we have a unique opportunity to learn from the school of this loving and tender father. He has left for us a singular imprint of what it means to be a father, a better person, a saint. No matter what yesterday, last week or last year may have been like, St. Joseph’s courage inspires us with deep faith that tomorrow will be better. He knows about personal suffering; he knows about hard work, and he knows about worrying for safety and security. With him as our beacon of hope we are filled with a reservoir of hope that even the worst pandemic eventually passes; even darkness eventually gives way to the light, and even the curse of the cross gives way to the joy of the resurrection.

When life seems uncertain and filled with darkness, when we feel trapped, wonder how to carry on and are about to lose hope,

let us remember what St. Joseph went through and how he courageously and creatively “turned lemons into lemonade”. “Joseph,” says Pope Francis, “set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history. He did not look for shortcuts, but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibility for it. He was the true “miracle” by which God saves the child Jesus and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph’s creative courage. Arriving in Bethlehem and finding no lodging where Mary could give birth, Joseph took a stable and, as best he could, turned it into a welcoming home for the Son of God come into the world (cf. Lk 2:6-7). Faced with imminent danger from Herod, who wanted to kill the child, Joseph was warned once again in a dream to protect the child, and rose in the middle of the night to prepare the flight into Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-14)” (*Patris Corde*). Indeed, his world was not an easy one, but in humility he did not obstruct God from communicating His abundant gifts to him.

At times our world may look so big and society so complicated and sophisticated, we might wonder if we have a place in it, if our contribution matters. It might seem wherever we turn evil is winning and cannot be conquered. We might doubt if it matters at all to be just and to seek justice, to be peaceful and to promote

peace, to be kind and respectful, to be loving and charitable and, above all, to be good people. We might be asking ourselves if virtue still appeals in a world where vice is encouraged and celebrated. St. Joseph would respond with an emphatic yes while, of course, maintaining a realistic approach that evil is there to be seen, along with suffering — and a lot of it. But he would not sit idle with arms folded in frustration. Instead, he would do his part, however small because it is the small gestures of love and acts of kindness that make the world a better place. For **“if I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain; If I can ease one life the aching, Or cool one pain, Or help one fainting robin Unto his nest again, I shall not live in vain”**, writes Emily Dickinson.

For us who are inebriated by the Blood of Christ, we know even shedding blood for the sake of the glory of God is not in vain. Our faith has been sustained and regenerated by the the blood of many martyrs. They were devoured, flesh and blood, at the Coliseum and many other places only to give birth to even more Christians. As we read *Fratelli tutti*, martyrdom is still happening today in many different forms. I say the *fratello* we are looking for is to be found in St. Joseph. Certainly, the pandemic has revealed to us that there are courageous, loving, kind and tender souls like him out there. Like him they do not make themselves the centre of things, but focus instead on serving the lives of others. Am I that soul?



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