

DO WE KNOW OUR CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING ON THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER?

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – 18 June 2023

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

POPE FRANCIS 'FRATELLI TUTTI' – ON FRATERNITY AND SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP' (SIBLINGS ALL)

As we tackle important social justice issues in Australian society, do we know how to apply our Catholic social justice teaching to each issue?

This weekend is our annual parish St Vincent de Paul Winter Appeal with speakers at all Masses. *As we listen to our speakers, how do the issues raised by them enlighten our understanding of kindness and the challenges of poverty in local society?*

One of the keys in the last 10 years to understanding Catholic social justice teachings, is to understand '*encounter*'. Pope Francis speaks of the art of encounter and the culture of encounter. I have selected these quotes from his challenging justice teaching 'Fratelli Tutti' – On Fraternity and Social Friendship' (Siblings All)

MY SELECTION OF QUOTES:

ART OF ENCOUNTER "*Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter*". 215

A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER "*I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions... a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life.*" 215

CULTURE "*The word "culture" points to something deeply embedded within a people, its most cherished convictions and its way of life. A people's "culture" is more than an abstract idea. It has to do with their desires, their interests and ultimately the way they live their lives.*" 216

CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER "*To speak of a "culture of encounter" means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life. The subject of this culture is the people, not simply one part of society that would pacify the rest with the help of professional and media resources.*" 216

PROCESSES OF ENCOUNTER "*What is important is to create processes of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences.*" 217

OTHER PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO BE THEMSELVES AND TO BE DIFFERENT "*All this calls for the ability to recognize other people's right to be themselves and to be different. This recognition, as it becomes a culture, makes possible the creation of a social covenant. Without it, subtle ways can be found to make others insignificant, irrelevant, of no value to society. While rejecting certain visible forms of violence, another more insidious kind of violence can take root: the*

violence of those who despise people who are different, especially when their demands in any way compromise their own particular interests.” 218

GENUINE SOCIAL ENCOUNTER AND CULTURAL COVENANT *“Genuine social encounter calls for a dialogue that engages the culture shared by the majority of the population. It often happens that good ideas are not accepted by the poorer sectors of society because they are presented in a cultural garb that is not their own and with which they cannot identify. A realistic and inclusive social covenant must also be a “cultural covenant”, one that respects and acknowledges the different worldviews, cultures and lifestyles that coexist in society.” 219*

COVENANT AND LOVE *“Such a covenant also demands the realization that some things may have to be renounced for the common good. No one can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or her every desire, since that pretension would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights. A false notion of tolerance has to give way to a dialogic realism on the part of men and women who remain faithful to their own principles while recognizing that others also have the right to do likewise. This is the genuine acknowledgment of the other that is made possible by love alone. We have to stand in the place of others, if we are to discover what is genuine, or at least understandable, in their motivations and concerns.” 221*

RENEWED ENCOUNTER AND THE RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED *“Renewed encounter does not mean returning to a time prior to conflicts. All of us change over time. Pain and conflict transform us. We no longer have use for empty diplomacy, dissimulation, double-speak, hidden agendas and good manners that mask reality. Those who were fierce enemies have to speak from the stark and clear truth. They have to learn how to cultivate a penitential memory, one that can accept the past in order not to cloud the future with their own regrets, problems and plans. Only by basing themselves on the historical truth of events will they be able to make a broad and persevering effort to understand one another and to strive for a new synthesis for the good of all. Every “peace process requires enduring commitment. It is a patient effort to seek truth and justice, to honour the memory of victims and to open the way, step by step, to a shared hope stronger than the desire for vengeance”. As the Bishops of the Congo have said with regard to one recurring conflict: “Peace agreements on paper will not be enough. We will have to go further, by respecting the demands of truth regarding the origins of this recurring crisis. The people have the right to know what happened” . “226*

THE MEANING OF TRUTH IN BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE *“Truth, in fact, is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy. All three together are essential to building peace; each, moreover, prevents the other from being altered... Truth should not lead to revenge, but rather to reconciliation and forgiveness. Truth means telling families torn apart by pain what happened to their missing relatives. Truth means confessing what happened to minors recruited by cruel and violent people. Truth means recognizing the pain of women who are victims of violence and abuse... Every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound in humanity’s flesh; every violent death diminishes us as people... Violence leads to more violence, hatred to more hatred, death to more death. We must break this cycle which seems inescapable” . “227*

KINDNESS AS A FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT *“Saint Paul describes kindness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). He uses the Greek word chrestótes, which describes an attitude that is gentle, pleasant and supportive, not rude or coarse. Individuals who possess this quality help make*

other people's lives more bearable, especially by sharing the weight of their problems, needs and fears. This way of treating others can take different forms: an act of kindness, a concern not to offend by word or deed, a readiness to alleviate their burdens. It involves "speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement" and not "words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn". "223

THE IMPORTANCE OF KINDNESS IN A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

"Kindness frees us from the cruelty that at times infects human relationships, from the anxiety that prevents us from thinking of others, from the frantic flurry of activity that forgets that others also have a right to be happy. Often nowadays we find neither the time nor the energy to stop and be kind to others, to say "excuse me", "pardon me", "thank you". Yet every now and then, miraculously, a kind person appears and is willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference. If we make a daily effort to do exactly this, we can create a healthy social atmosphere in which misunderstandings can be overcome and conflict forestalled. Kindness ought to be cultivated; it is no superficial bourgeois virtue. Precisely because it entails esteem and respect for others, once kindness becomes a culture within society it transforms lifestyles, relationships and the ways ideas are discussed and compared. Kindness facilitates the quest for consensus; it opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn all bridges." 224

Throughout the Bible we develop our understanding of social justice principles and examples such as the encounters of social prophets in the Old Testament and the teachings and dialogues of Jesus with people in the Gospels.

Today's passage doesn't give all the biblical points like the insights in the Last Judgement description in Matthew's Gospel or the Mission of Jesus (quoting Isaiah) in Luke's Gospel. We know that the two greatest Christian commandments are love of God and love of neighbour. Both commandments are the basis of what we mean as Christians by developing a culture of encounter. But today's particular Gospel passage does give us further insights.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 9:36-10:8

Step 1. Encounter people where they are. Identify their needs. Feel with them. *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*

Step 2. Bring this reality to prayer. *"Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' "*

Step 3. Action. Empowering others. Healing *"Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness."*

Step 4. Naming the people who minister.

"These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him."

Step 5. Instructions for mission.

The other three Gospels record a wider mission of Jesus to all.

Matthew's Gospel, written primarily, to Jewish Christians, concentrated initially on the Jewish people, and widened it later to all. The instructions here begin with an encounter with a particular group.

“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’”

Step 6. Message of the kingdom or reign of God. *“As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” “*

Step 7. Further Action – Healing *“Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. “*

Step 8. In this culture of encounter, there are no financial or class restrictions. Healing is not only for those who can financially afford it. Healing is not only for the people in powerful positions. It is received as a gift from God freely, and to be share freely with all. *‘You received without payment; give without payment.’”*

Let us now listen to our St Vincent de Paul speakers.

Thank you.

Father Gerry

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/061823.cfm>

‘Fratelli Tutti’ – On Fraternity and Social Friendship’ (Siblings All) <https://bit.ly/FratelliTutti03102020>

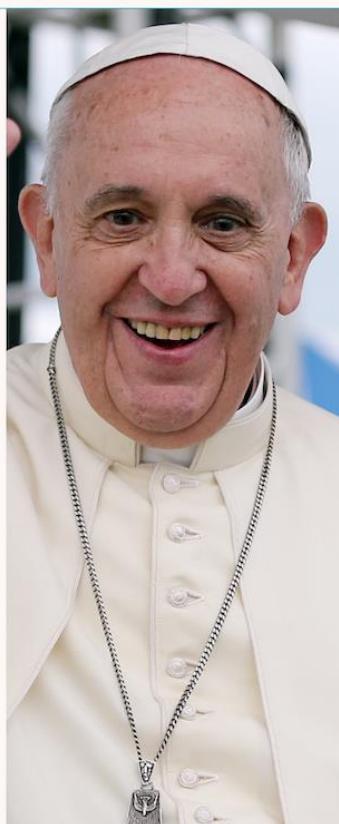
JESUS WAY: HIS SIMPLE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER



An invitation to work for
“**the culture of encounter**”,
in a simple way, “**as Jesus did**”:
not just seeing, but looking;
not just hearing, but listening;
not just passing people by,
but stopping with them;
not just saying
“what a shame, poor people!”,
but allowing yourself to be
moved with compassion;
“and then to draw near,
to touch and to say:
‘Do not weep’ and to give at
least a drop of life”.

POPE FRANCIS

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