



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Sisters and Brothers All

ON OCTOBER 3, 2020, THE EVE OF THE FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS, POPE FRANCIS ISSUED HIS THIRD ENCYCLICAL, *FRATELLI TUTTI* (*BROTHERS AND SISTERS ALL*). IN IT, WORRIED BY A decline in dialogue and cohesion within and between nations, he uses the parable of the Good Shepherd as the basis for a call to universal fraternity, social friendship, and a better kind of politics. Dialog is the path, boundary-less love the means. Eight of us read and via Zoom discussed *Fratelli tutti* in January and February, 2021. This *Desert Chronicle* is a summary of what we learned from the four central chapters of *Fratelli tutti*. They are an invitation into a better world, as is the Pope's new book, *Let Us Dream* (Simon & Schuster, 2020).



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Prior's Letter

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

I writing am shortly before March and the Feast of St. Joseph. Pope Francis had made the year between December 8, 2020 and December 8, 2021, a year dedicated to St. Joseph. In his Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, addressed to all of us on the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, he wrote: "Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble."

Pope Francis reminds us that Ash Wednesday is a day for praying to St. Joseph. Many Benedictine Monasteries have a special devotion to St. Joseph. From Mount Angel we inherited the custom of daily recitation of the Litany of St. Joseph after our evening meal for "our spiritual and material welfare."

St. Joseph cared for the welfare of the Holy Family. He protected Mary from criticism. He led Jesus and Mary to safety in Egypt, where they lived as migrants. He provided home and welfare for the Holy Family. He did so "unnoticed, a daily, discreet, and hidden presence."

Joseph was a tender and loving father. He taught Jesus, and modeled a way of life and how to relate to his mother and others. He taught Jesus how to have concern for the needs of others, and how to be trustworthy in the workplace. When there were days of uncertainty about the future, Joseph had trust in God, and let God steer his course. "At times we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture."

Joseph was an accepting father. There were things he didn't completely understand or that seemed contrary to his own way of doing things, as when the boy Jesus decided to remain in the Temple. Pope Francis notes: "only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is."

Joseph was a working father. Employment and unemployment are major issues in our day. Respect for the dignity of all workers and just wages need our attention and action. "There is a renewed need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which Saint Joseph is an exemplary patron."

Joseph was a father in the shadows. "In his relationship to Jesus, Joseph was the earthly shadow of the heavenly father: he watched over him, and protected him."

The Pope tells us, "whatever our vocation, whether to marriage, celibacy or virginity, our gift of self will not come to fulfillment if it stops at sacrifice; were that the case, instead of becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love, the gift of self would risk being an expression of unhappiness, sadness and frustration."

So as we make our Lenten journey, giving of ourselves, whatever form it takes, will surely make us followers of the Lord. May it lead us all to a fruitful celebration of Easter. We miss seeing many of you and hope that will change. We're all getting vaccinated, which will help. How soon and how much we can open, we don't know right now. Easter blessings!

Peace and good things.

Fr. Boniface, O.S.B.

P.S. Our evening litany to St. Joseph "for our spiritual and material needs" includes several repair jobs we are considering. The soffits on the ministry center roof need repair, and possibly replacement. We're also looking at re-surfacing the paved walk that circles the ministry center. Our "locked down" status makes that a challenge right now. If you can help, we'll be grateful. (We are about to install a tab on our website so that anyone who wants to make a donation electronically can do so.)



Fratelli Tutti

RECOGNIZING MY NEIGHBORS

“*Having doubts and fears is not a sin... The sin is to allow these fears to determine our responses, to limit our choices, to compromise respect and generosity, to feed hostility and rejection... The sin is to refuse to encounter the other, the different, the neighbor, when this is in fact a privileged opportunity to encounter the Lord ... to overcome our fears so as to encounter the other, to welcome, to know and to acknowledge him or her.*”

POPE FRANCIS IS NOTABLE FOR HIS SUSPICION OF WALLS, WHETHER STEEL WALLS SEPARATING NATIONS OR CULTURAL WALLS EXCLUDING SOME and privileging others. In chapter 3, he cites a number of thinkers who have written that to find fulfillment human beings must give of themselves, and to know who they are they must communicate with others. To know the true beauty of life one must love (88-89).

Friendships and marriages that close themselves off from others tend toward selfishness and mere self-preservation. Benedictine monks have valued hospitality because they were welcoming Christ in the traveler or visitor, but also because others brought them challenges and were gifts that the monks valued. To attain the values the monks sought, they knew they had to move beyond themselves, even if that meant some upset of their silence and routines. (90-91).

The need for openness arises from the primacy of love. One can have virtues like thirst for justice, but they cannot be alive without love (92). As St. John of the Cross wrote, in the evening of our lives we will be judged on our love. Love, St. Thomas taught, unites us with others, so that we desire to advance their good. We esteem their worth; they are dear to us, pleasing, and beautiful. Only such love makes possible the goal that Pope Francis is setting for us: a social friendship that excludes no one and is open to all (93-94).

Such love compels us “toward universal communion.” Hence, what is true at the individual level is true at the level of nations as well. Nations, too, stifle their growth if they become closed. As a society should be composed of men and women who care for each other, so nations should care for the common good of all people. The reach of love does not know geographical barriers. Within a nation, people should not be excluded from full participation in the life and goods of the nation by others’ racism, disabilities, or old age. (95-99).

Pope Francis defines social friendship as a love that transcends internal or external borders. The Good Samaritan (cf. ch. 2) took time to make himself a neighbor to a stranger. Social friendship does not make everyone uniform; it views others not as associates, but as neighbors. Freedom and equality need the fraternity that recognizes the “values of reciprocity and shared enrichment” (103). “Individualism won’t make us more free, more equal, more fraternal” (105).

Social friendship promotes the good of all persons. Every person

has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally. Without recognition of this right, there is no future for the human race (107). The free market and efficiency are not enough; the primary concern must be for individuals, each of them, and the common good (108). Individuals are not all born with the same opportunities (109). The young children of Syrian refugees born in a camp in Greece, or African-American children born in a neighborhood with substandard schools start out at great disadvantage compared to children of well-off families. They need accompaniment and help if they are to live with dignity and develop integrally.

Social friendship is concern not just for material welfare, but for moral development as well. Societies—families, teachers, communicators—have the opportunity and the obligation to pass on moral values (114). Solidarity involves giving face-to-face service, especially to the poor (115-18).

A prominent tenet of Catholic social teaching is “the common destination of created goods.” That means that all deserve a fair share of the earth’s bounty, so that they have access to food, shelter, clothing medical care and education. There is no right to have excess or unlimited private property, especially when others in the human community are starving or homeless. Nor is there any right to squander or hoard natural resources (119-124).

The principle of “the common destination of creation” applies to nations as well as to people within a nation. A nation’s or “territory’s goods must not be denied to a needy person coming from elsewhere” (124). Nations can also work to improve living conditions in other countries so that people do not need to flee from them to survive (126). All this calls for a new way of thinking, but it is the only way to peace (127).

In summary, our love must transcend borders and exclude no one. That means valuing and caring for everyone. Such social friendship ought to exist between individuals, but also between nations. Since God destined the goods of creation for all, individuals and nations must share, not hoard, so that the dignity of all people is respected and they have a fair share in the goods of the earth. •



HEARTS OPEN TO THE WORLD

“*Dialogue, in fact, educates when the person relates with respect, esteem and sincere listening, and is expressed with authenticity without obscuring or softening one’s own identity nourished by evangelical inspiration.*”

MORE THAN 80 YEARS AGO THE JESUIT PRIEST AND PALEONTOLOGIST, PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, WROTE IN *THE PHENOMENON OF MAN* (PUBLISHED POSTHUMOUSLY IN 1955), that as humanity has gradually spread across the earth and increased in numbers, so it would now converge in the “noosphere,” as communication tied people together. He has been proved correct.

In ch. 4 of *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis considers how social friendship could guide globalization in constructive ways. Throughout his encyclical he recognizes a tension between the local and the universal. The danger of globalization currently is that globalized economics has given tremendous power to certain corporations and nations so that they may so influence what other countries do and buy to such an extent that local cultures are endangered. The danger for local communities is that they close in on themselves and become stagnant. Healthy societies are sure of their own values and open to the stimulus and gifts that other cultures can bring them (142-150).

Pope Francis is particularly concerned about refugees and immigrants. Changes in climate and economics have deprived many people of the chance to make a living. Wars and tyrannies have destroyed people’s homes and cities; some groups, such as Christians and other minorities under Isis and the Rohingya in Myanmar are victims of genocidal terror. Such people are compelled to emigrate. “We are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfillment.” There are four steps in welcoming asylum seekers and immigrants: “welcome, protect, promote and integrate” (129). Those who have been in a country for a long time should have full citizenship (131). The arrival and integration of people from different cultures can be a gift, a chance for growth and enrichment. If people anywhere in the world are trapped in poverty, in the end this will impoverish us all (132-7).•

PAPA FRANCESCO **FRATELLI TUTTI**

*Lettera enciclica
sulla fraternità e l'amicizia sociale*



PREFAZIONE
MARIO DELPINI

INTRODUZIONE
GIACOMO COSTA



A BETTER KIND OF POLITICS

“Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity. Cowardice in defending it is a grave sin.”

ONE OF THE OBSTACLES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF “A GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF FRATERNITY BASED ON THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP” is the state of politics today. In many parts of the world, including our own, there is deep dissatisfaction with the current state of politics. In our country there seems to be legislative gridlock, the result of rigid ideological differences and parties that are more concerned about winning elections than about good government. Pope Francis addresses this in ch. 5.

He singles out two forms of inadequate politics today. One is populism, fostered by demagogues who try to rally people to their side by demonizing another party, nationality or ethnicity. A “people,” from which the word “popular” comes, share an identity arising from social and cultural bonds formed slowly over a long period of time (158). Although “populism” can be a way of mobilizing energy in a positive way, populist leaders sometimes exploit people’s fears or prejudices to their personal advantage or to maintain power. Often this involves appealing to a people’s worst and most selfish inclinations or seeking short term advantage rather than the long-term common good (161). One issue that Pope Francis discusses is employment. In a masterful summary of Catholic social teaching on the dignity of work, he says that work, besides being a means of earning what one needs to live, is also a means “of personal growth, the building of healthy relationships, self-expression and the exchange of gifts”; work also gives a sense of shared responsibility for developing a better world (162). Here I thought of a wonderful essay, *Work*, by Ade de Bethune (reprinted, Catholic Authors Press, 2007), an artist who illustrated the Catholic Worker for many years and who designed our outdoor stations.

The other form of politics that Pope Francis finds problematic is the form of liberalism that promotes individualism without a proper concern for the common good or believes that an unregulated market will bring prosperity to all. He cautions that true charity unites private life and liberty with public order, citing the French Protestant philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, “a domestic hearth has no real warmth, unless it is safeguarded by ... a state of tranquility founded on law, and enjoys a minimum of wellbeing ensured by the division of labor, commercial exchange, social justice and political citizenship” (164). What is needed is an economic policy that promotes productive diversity and business creativity and creates work that meets the purposes mentioned above. Human dignity, not profits, must be the center (168). There needs to be social, political and economic participation that includes popular movements. Integral development requires not just policies for the poor, but with and of the poor, policies

that unite people (169).

The economic crisis of 2007-8 and the current pandemic show the need for political institutions that are not dominated by financial forces. There need to be more effective world organizations empowered to provide for the global common good (170-75). Multilateral agreements are a means to achieve this, if nations will abide by them. Some non-governmental organizations are doing good work, illustrating the value of subsidiarity.

At this point Pope Francis shifts his focus to the inner life of politics, what he calls social and political charity. He notes that for many today, “politics” is a distasteful word. However, politics is necessary. We need politics that can reform and coordinate institutions, promote best practices and overcome undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia. Such politics needs to uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good (178-79).

Political charity is love at its most vast. It makes us love the common good, the good of all people. Social love can inspire new ways of approaching problems and renewing structures from within. We need both truth and charity. Political charity works to overcome conditions that cause suffering, especially for those who are most in need. Such charity is expressed in openness to everyone; it listens to other points of view. Here it is not a matter of economic negotiations, but the exchange of gifts. (180-192).

Loving even the most insignificant human being as a brother or sister, as if there were no one else in the world, is never a waste of time (193). Politics must make room for tender love, “a love that draws near and becomes real, that starts from our hearts and reaches the eyes, the ears and the hands” (195). Even if results are not obvious, none of our acts of love will be lost. The questions politicians need ask are not “How many people voted for me?” or “How many endorsed me?” but rather:

What did I do for the progress of our people?

What mark did I leave on the life of society?

What real relationships did I create?

What positive forces did I unleash?

How much social peace did I sow?

What good did I achieve in the position entrusted to me?

In summary: *neither populism nor liberal individualism is an adequate form of politics. What is needed is a politics that looks for the long-term good of all people, that looks to provide meaningful work for all. The motivation for such a politics is love, a love open to all, caring for each tenderly.*•

DIALOGUE AND FRIENDSHIP IN SOCIETY

“It is impossible for peace to exist without dialogue. All the wars, all the strife, all the unsolved problems over which we clash are due to a lack of dialogue. When there is a problem, talk: this makes peace.”

IN CHAPTER SIX, POPE FRANCIS RETURNS TO A FAVORITE IDEA OF HIS, DIALOGUE, WITHOUT WHICH CIVIL LIFE IS IMPOSSIBLE. DIALOGUE includes speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and finding common ground. If we want to help and encounter one another, dialogue is essential. Neither withdrawal into one's own little world or destructive violence provides an escape from reality. Dialogue occurs between generations and between different sectors and levels of a culture. Dialogue is not parallel monologues, uttered on the assumption that people who think differently are flat out wrong. For some it is easier to discredit and insult others rather than enter into respectful dialogue. This can occur in any context. The concern then is not joint efforts for the common good, but imposing one's own opinions (198-202).

“Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other's point of view and to admit it may include legitimate convictions and concerns.” Public discussion that does not manipulate or conceal information is a stimulus to find or better express the truth. Media can facilitate dialogue, or they can exploit weaknesses and bring out the worst in people (202-205). The basis of consensus is not relativism or letting positive law be the ultimate norm. Law must be based on the conviction that each human being is sacred and inviolable. We must believe that we can find solid foundations, unchanging truths that are the basis for our decisions and laws. Otherwise, good and evil are just a calculus of benefits. To find such foundations we need dialogue that is “illuminated by clear thinking, rational arguments, a variety of perspectives and the contribution of different fields of knowledge and points of view.” Consensus, the interests of society and the reality of objective truth can be in harmony (206-214).

Their culture is a people's cherished convictions, interests, and way of life. We need to aim at a culture of encounter that is able to transcend our differences and divisions. This is not expressed by a circle that obliterates all differences, but by a “many-sided polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity that is greater than any of its parts.” The different parts complement and enrich each other, even if there are disagreements. It is a long, slow process to create such a

culture of encounter, but it is the sure path to peace. It calls for the ability to recognize other people's right to be themselves and to be different. Despising people is a form of violence. A culture of encounter offers “opportunities for advancement and social integration to all” (215-221).

Consumerist individualism views others as obstacles and annoyances, which makes us increasingly aggressive. The practical step to remedy this is to practice kindness: to be gentle, pleasant and supportive; make other people's lives more bearable; speak words of comfort and encouragement. Kindness means saying thank you, smiling, taking time to listen. Because it entails esteem and respect for others, kindness can transform a society and change the way ideas are discussed. It facilitates the quest for consensus (222-224).

Pope Francis goes on in ch. 7 to discuss re-establishing consensus after violent conflict, in which he speaks of remembering, of punishment, and the possibility of forgiveness. He ends ch. 7 by questioning whether there can be such a thing as a just war today and by reiterating Catholic opposition to the death penalty. In ch. 8 he discusses the role of religions in developing world fraternity. However, we can end with ch. 6's call to a culture of dialogue, based on looking at and listening to each other in a sincere effort at mutual understanding and consensus that respects the dignity of each person. And where to begin? With kindness and with his ecumenical Christian prayer (see p. 8).•





Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

NOVEMBER

All Saints Day was celebrated on Sunday, so in addition to our liturgical celebration, we had our monthly social and something new for us, a bonfire in the patio after supper.

We've had plumbing repairs in the monastery wing. Dripping shower faucets in a half dozen rooms needed repair. Then, the circulation pump for hot water went down, and the community lived with tepid water in the showers until the plumbers could return.

Br. Sylvester and John Wasko took pictures for the Christmas card that we send to community friends. We made some peanut brittle to give to the many people who help us in various ways. We didn't make any peanut brittle for sale this year. Our usual venue to sell is the Jerome parish bazaar, and we didn't feel safe about spending time there, even with social distancing.

We steam cleaned carpets in the trailer and some of the rooms in the monastery. It was a major effort, but necessary. Since it required furniture to be moved (and removed), the cleaning process went beyond the carpet. St. Vincent de Paul, La Posada, and local thrift stores were beneficiaries. And we benefitted too.

We were given an oxygen calibrator to use in case one of us should have COVID-19. As it turns out, one of us did, but not here at the monastery. Fr. Jerome in St. Rita's Parish in Kellogg contracted the virus and was in the hospital for five days. He is recovering at the parish. Sadly, his mother, Lillian Montez passed away while Fr. Jerome was unable to travel to Colorado. Our prayers and condolences are with our confrere.

On November 8 we had our first snow, about 1". On the 13th we had perhaps 2 or 3". Ben Marshall cleared the lane and parking area. The weather is staying cold, but not much. We have even had a few days of 50 degrees.

On Thanksgiving Day, we followed our Saturday schedule for rising, had Vespers and Compline mid-afternoon, and a very nice dinner prepared by Fr. Ezekiel. Some friends and neighbors provided smoked salmon and pie, plus another turkey.

Fr. Ezekiel had a birthday on November 30. Fr. Jerome, who has recovered from the virus,

will have his 61st birthday of December 23. Br. Sylvester will have a name day on December 31.

DECEMBER

The circulation pump for hot water was fixed on December 1, so warm showers are again a possibility. O happy day!

For our monthly "social" we had pizza instead of Chinese. We got used to Chinese because Fr. Koelsch was the provider and that was his preference.

For financial and practical reasons, we have been gradually replacing lights with LED fixtures. The main dining area has recently been done.

We delivered peanut brittle to local friends and benefactors. It gave us a chance to see, at a masked and safe distance, friends we haven't seen since October. We mailed the rest. The cost of postage exceeds the cost of the brittle! If we sell some next year, maybe we should raise the price.

Fr. Meinrad contracted the virus and was secluded for a week or so. He and the Sisters at St. Gertrude's are staying isolated.

Christmas decorations were limited to a tree in our dining room, until the chapel was decorated on Dec. 23-4. The tree decorations included ornaments symbolic of each of us, selected by Br. Sylvester. We changed our Christmas schedule this year, so we had Vigils at 8:15, followed by Mass at 9:00PM, so we had a good night's rest. On Christmas day, Fr. Ezekiel prepared a very good meal. We had a "free evening." Celebrating the Divine Office was a little complicated because of schedule changes the weekend following Christmas.

Br. Tobiah's brother, Dan, died on Dec. 31. And so 2020 ended. No one said they stayed up to welcome 2021. Fr. Meinrad will have a name day on January 21.

JANUARY

We began the year with Fr. Hugh celebrating the Solemnity of Mary at Mass. We had early vespers and compline, and a "free evening". The Rose Bowl game was on cable, which we don't have, but we didn't miss much.

Epiphany followed in quick succession. For our monthly "social" and takeout dinner, we were back to Chinese.

On January 8, there were hundreds of dead starlings on the property. Idaho Fish and Game told that the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture has a program to reduce the starling population in dairies. Poisoned feed, specifically targeted for starlings, is periodically placed around the dairies. We have a dairy next door and the birds roost in our front pasture.

Christmas Season ended and Br. Sylvester re-decorated the chapel. Fr. Hugh continued the "adult faith formation" program with a discussion of Pope Francis' *Fratelli tutti*. The results of their discussions are in this issue.

Some teachers came to collect owl pellets one cold night mid-month.

We had our annual corporation meeting and a financial report. Diane Sparks, our Business Manager led us through the numbers in a clear and orderly fashion. It only took 45 minutes.

February will include birthdays for Br. Selby on the 6th, and Fr. Boniface on the 9th.

FEBRUARY

We've gotten appointments to be vaccinated, and some of us have done so. We've been spared so far. Some of our close friends have not.

The Missionary Servants of the Word who recently arrived from Mexico to serve in the Diocese, stopped by for a brief visit, en-route to Idaho Falls. It was a pleasure to meet them. The same day we had a power outage for several hours and some snow.

Super Bowl Sunday coincided with our monthly social.

We have been devoting lockdown time to cleaning some unoccupied rooms.

We received a preliminary bid for repairing the soffits on the Ministry Center. Completion will depend on raising the funds.

Lent will bring some weekly time for conferences on theology or scripture. It will also be time for our annual retreat, February 21-26. We make use of video presentations by Luke Timothy Johnson and Bishop Robert Barron. •





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An Ecumenical Prayer

-Pope Francis

O God, Trinity of love, from the profound communion of your divine life, pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love. Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus, in his family of Nazareth, and in the early Christian community.

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel, discovering Christ in each human being, recognizing him crucified in the sufferings of the abandoned and forgotten of our world, and risen in each brother or sister who makes a new start.

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



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