



gifted to give
600 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

2021 YEAR OF MISSIO AD GENTES

and

ENCYCLICAL LETTER

FRATELLI TUTTI

of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship



Simbang Gabi 2020



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BEGINNING WORDS

*F*or nine years we have been preparing for the grand celebration of Christianization of the Philippines. And we have created highlights to express our joy in the Gospel by introduction various themes to reflect on and to evaluate where we are at as faithful in Christ and the Gospel. The themes are meant not just to gauge how much we have matured in the faith, but to set direction where we are going after 500 years of being faithful in Christ.

Towards the last quarter of the COVID19 pandemic year, Pope Francis signed and promulgated *Fratelli Tutti*, the encyclical on brotherhood and social friendship, which has been reviewed as the proper document to accompany the Church toward a new chapter of being Church – that we are brothers (and sisters) all. What a beautiful lighthouse to guide us while we remain in the midst of turmoil and havoc and while we are in our pilgrimage toward the glory that awaits us. The beacon of this lighthouse is imperatively sending us that the pastoral approach to mission is through our relationship with one another, especially with the poor and the needy.

The Philippine Church dedicates 2021 pastoral year to missionary renewal to mark 500 years of the arrival of the Gospel in the land. The Philippine bishops have chosen, “*Missio ad Gentes*”, as the theme of the pastoral year 2021.

Our Simbang Gabi 2020 is a unique preparation for Christmas because it segues from the usual and traditional manner we observe it. COVID19 remains a threat to our health and concern remains focus on how we avoid being contaminated by the virus and how we continue to protect one another. Our celebration spells the lawyer’s question; “and, who is my neighbor?”

Our reflections here are rooted from the reflections of various institutions, theologians and pastoral workers. Nothing originates from me. And I do not claim any authority on the matter being presented. These are all a humble suggestion, and an expression of assistance to those who are finding little time to read the long document (287 paragraphs), *Fratelli Tutti*. But I can assure you it is worth reading it. And at the back of these reflections is the inspiration that we are all being sent to bring the Gospel to all, because all are brothers and sisters.

We have received the precious gift, that is, our faith in Christ Jesus, the Emmanuel, who pitched his tent among us, as a nation. Our Simbang Gabi reflections should become formidable channels of handing this gift, especially in our present trying moments, not just in our health but more profoundly in our relationship with our brothers and sisters. Let us inflame this world in darkness with the gift of faith, gift of love, gift of the Gospel.

Fr. Darsv

CBCP Pastoral Letter for the Year 2021

MISSIO AD GENTES

Becoming Jesus' Missionary Disciples

Dearly Beloved People of God,

The Philippine Church rejoices as it enters a national celebration of the 500 Years of Christianity in our treasured homeland. Five centuries ago we received the marvelous gift of the Christian faith; our hearts overflow with joy and gratitude. Why of all the nations and peoples in Asia was the Philippines chosen by God to be among the first to receive this precious gift? The clear answer is simply this: God's magnanimous, overflowing love.

We recall what God told his people Israel regarding his choice: "It was not because you are the largest of all nations that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you, for you are really the smallest of all nations. It was because the Lord loved you and because of his fidelity..." (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Only God's freely given love can illuminate the choice of the Filipino people to receive this valuable gift of faith!

The Christian faith arrived and prospered in our land through the dedication and heroic sacrifices of thousands of men and women missionaries from various parts of the world. They treasured the gift of faith they had received and desired to share this gift with others. As the theme chosen by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) for this fifth centennial notes: all Christians are "gifted to give." This "giftedness" motivated generous missionaries over the centuries; it must also enflame the hearts of all of us today to engage in mission here at home and in other countries (*missio ad gentes*). Indeed, this is part of Jesus' mission mandate to his disciples: "What you have received as a gift, give as a gift" (Matthew 10:8). We pray for a *missionary renewal* of our Church—both at home (*ad intra*) and beyond our borders (*ad extra*) during our celebration of the 500 years—and into the future!

Missionary Transformation. Our beloved Pope Francis, who visited us in 2015, is committed to the missionary renewal of the entire Church; we can take inspiration from his document *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*. He asserts that we need an “evangelizing Church that comes out of herself,” not a Church that is “self-referential” and “lives within herself, of herself, for herself” (cf. EG 20-24). Francis says: “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.... All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EG 27). We seek to renew our mission enthusiasm here at home as well as *missio ad gentes*, mission to other nations and peoples.

Pope Francis continues: “Missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*.... We need to move ‘from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry’” (EG 15). “I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has programmatic significance and important consequences.... Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’” (EG 25). We must seek to “put all things in a missionary key” (EG 34). We recall the challenge of Pope John Paul II during his 1981 visit to our Church: “I wish to tell you of my special desire: that the Filipinos will become the foremost missionaries of the Church in Asia.” This is a clear invitation to engage in *missio ad gentes*!

Pope Francis’ insights about Church missionary renewal come from his deep personal relationship with Christ. He writes: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (EG 3). A pivotal insight of Pope Francis is that “we are all missionary disciples” (EG 119); through baptism, “all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples” (EG 120). All Christians are “agents of evangelization.” Missionary evangelization “calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.... Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’” (EG 120).

Joy: A Convincing Sign. For Pope Francis, salvation history is a “great stream of joy” (EG 5) which we must also enter. Let the joy of faith be revived, because God’s mercies never end (cf. EG 6). Unfortunately, “there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter” (EG 6). “An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral” (EG 10). We must *not* become “querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses’” (EG 85). “May the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ (EG 10; cf. EN 75). We all must *not* “end up stifling the joy of mission” (EG 79), both here at home and in other lands!

Mercy: Today’s Pathway in Mission. Pope Francis continually insists that mercy is the very essence of God. In his *Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)* Francis expresses it this way: *mercy is God’s identity card*. He says: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2). Francis quotes Saint Thomas Aquinas, who asserts that “mercy is the greatest of all virtues; ... all the others revolve around it ... it is proper to God to have mercy” (EG 37). “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love” (MV 10).

“The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person.... As the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action.... In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (MV 12).

Conclusion. Pope Francis’ profound thoughts on *missionary renewal, joy,* and *mercy* provide a solid compass to guide us as individuals and communities during our 500-years celebration and in the year 2021 which is dedicated to *missio ad gentes* (mission to all peoples). With Pope Francis we ask two graces of the Lord: “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor” (EG 109). “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm” (EG 80). We remain constant in prayer, asking our two canonized “foreign” missionary saints, Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod, to intercede for us so that our loving God will always abundantly bless our Church in the Philippines and all her many missionary endeavors!

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines,

+ ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.

Archbishop of Davao

President, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines

29 November 2020

First Sunday of Advent

15 December | FRATELLI TUTTI: AN INTRODUCTION

“Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 4:8–11

Pope Francis’s third papal encyclical *Fratelli tutti* was published by the Vatican on October 4, deliberately occurring on the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi. This encyclical is a keen diagnosis of the ills of our post-modern society, sharply railing against the failures seen in the global response to COVID-19, but it serves as something greater and purposeful to wake up the Church to a greater charity and purpose.

But why did His Holiness decide to release this now?

The short answer is simply the COVID-19 pandemic that has been rampaging much of the world for 8–10 months now. It is unnecessary to write about its impact on the world and its detrimental effects to healthcare systems and societies. However, Pope Francis clearly asserts throughout his encyclical that the pandemic has revealed the failures of societies to recognize human dignity in pre-pandemic times. Comparing this pandemic to the storm in Mark 4:35–41 in his *Extraordinary Moment of Prayer* last March, the Holy Father proclaimed:

“The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities.”

This is a foundation for this encyclical and begins to explain why it is more than an extended scolding of all the bad things going on in today’s world. Pope Francis’s first two encyclicals — *Lumen fidei* and *Laudato si’* — focus on the theological virtue of faith and the proper moral theology of man’s relationship to the environment, respectively. For his third encyclical, Francis incorporates the role of faith in an encouragement for us to redefine our proper relationships with one another.

16 December | BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 25-37 is the exemplar of the solidarity called for in 'Fratelli Tutti'.

The Good Samaritan's love is not bound by his cultural differences with the Judean man to whom he ministers. Nor does he use inconvenience as an excuse not to provide aid, as the Levite and the priest do, or to expect some kind of reward for his generosity. Instead of focusing on whether the man he encounters is "close enough" to be his neighbor, the Samaritan is an example of Christians' calling "to become neighbors to all".

"Jesus' parable summons us to rediscover our vocation as citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond," writes the Pope.

Francis' treatment of the Good Samaritan and solidarity is also the heart of the entire document. It's preceded by a chapter entitled "Dark Clouds Over a Closed World," which describes many of the ways - from economic exploitation to politics of fear and hate, empty individualism to cultural colonization - that humanity is currently failing its call to universal fraternity, made all the clearer by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The encyclical thus has to be understood as rooted in the *caritas* that nourishes the virtue of solidarity," said McCormick, who has challenged agenda-driven perspectives on the papacy before, "and in Pope Francis' understanding of how Catholic social teaching should be applied to the complex and varied social realities of our times." Pope Francis called for catechesis and preaching that "speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters."

Scott (Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom) A Jew who was excessively proud of his blood line and a chauvinist about his tradition would not permit a Samaritan to touch him, much less minister to him. The parable therefore forces upon its hearers the question: who among you will permit himself or herself to be served by a Samaritan? In a general way it can be replied that that only those who have nothing to lose by so doing can afford to do so. But note that the victim in the ditch is given only a passive role in the story. Permission to be served by the Samaritan is thus inability to resist. Put differently, all who are truly victims, truly disinherited, have no choice but to give themselves up to mercy. The despised half-breed has become the instrument of grace: as listeners, the Jews choke on the irony.

17 December | THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Pope Francis emphasized the pressing need today for “a theology of acceptance and dialogue”. He called for students of theology “to be educated in dialogue with Judaism and Islam, to understand the common roots and the differences of our religious identities” and “in this way to contribute more effectively to the building of a society that appreciates diversity and fosters respect, brotherhood and peaceful coexistence.”

Francis called on theologians “to foster in ever new ways the encounter of cultures with the sources of revelation and of Tradition.” He called for working toward a “theological Pentecost” that permits the women and men of our day to hear in their own language “a Christian reflection that responds to their search for meaning and a full life.”

For this to happen, he said, “it is necessary to start from the Gospel of mercy” and “it is also necessary to seriously take history into the heart of theology as an open space of encounter with the Lord.”

He explained that “dialogue is above all a method of discernment and of the announcement of the Word of love that is addressed to every person.” He asserted that the schools of theology “are renewed through the practice of discernment and through a dialogical way of proceeding” and called for dialogue “not only in posing the problems but also in searching together for ways to resolve them.”

He said this dialogue should be capable of integrating “the living criterion” of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus with “reading in reality, in creation and in history the theological connections, signs and references.” This is necessary “to understand how the historical and created reality is questioned by the revelation of the mystery of the love of God.”

Pope Francis emphasized that “dialogue as a theological hermeneutic” presupposes and involves “conscious listening” and, in the Mediterranean it means listening to the history, the cultures and the lived reality of the peoples and of the great monotheistic religions in order “to grasp not only the wounds but also the potential [for solutions].” He underlined the need to listen to “the young people” and also to understand how “the Christian communities and individual prophetic experiences” were able to incarnate the Gospel in sometimes conflictual, and often minority situations.

18 December | ECCLESIOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

“We want to be a Church that serves and leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be a sign of unity,” she said. “So that really is a challenge to the Church, that we cannot stay behind the walls of our churches, the literal walls of our parishes. We have to go out into the world to encounter those whom we meet there. It is a challenging message for many Catholics, and for myself. It’s a challenge for everyone.”

"Postmodernity is characterized by fragmentation of thought and experience which focuses attention on the present moment, on immediate satisfaction, on what works for me rather than on historical continuity, social consensus, or shared hopes for a common future. In this foundationless, relativistic, and alienated context there is, nevertheless, often a powerfully experienced need for some focus of meaning, some source of direction and value. The intense interest in spirituality today is no doubt partially an expression of this need. Religion, however, especially the type to which Christianity belongs, presupposes a unitary worldview whose master narrative stretching from creation to the end of the world is ontologically based and which makes claims to universal validity while promising an eschatological reward for delayed personal gratification and sacrificial social commitment. In other words, the Christian religion is intrinsically difficult to reconcile with a postmodern sensibility. By contrast, a non-religious spirituality is often very compatible with that sensibility precisely because it is usually a privatized, idiosyncratic, personally satisfying stance and practice which makes no doctrinal claims, imposes no moral authority outside one's own conscience, creates no necessary personal relationships or social responsibilities, and can be changed or abandoned whenever it seems not to work for the practitioner. Commitment, at least of any relatively permanent kind, which involves both an implied affirmation of personal subjectivity and a conviction about cosmic objectivity, is easily circumvented by a spirituality which has no institutional or community affiliation. Clearly such spirituality is much more compatible with a postmodern sensibility than the religion of any church, especially Christianity” (Sandra Marie Schneiders).

The religions are called to the service of fraternity in the world (Ch. 8). In dialogue and with hearts open to the world, we can establish social friendship and fraternity.

19 December | PASTORAL FOUNDATION

Pope Francis begins *Fratelli Tutti* with an assessment of the world. The assessment is comprehensive but unflattering. Pope Francis uses the word “common” frequently, as in “our common home” in reference to care for creation, and “the common good” in reference to the care of all human persons. The standard by which he evaluates the global reality is through the lens of “the common good.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines “common good” as, “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (CCC 1906). Thus, *Fratelli Tutti* says, “God has created all human being with equal rights, duties, and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sister” (FT 5). And again, “When the dignity of the human person is respected, and his or her rights recognized and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive, and the creativity of the human personality is released through actions that further the common good” (FT 22). This is the opposite of societies where often a privileged few determine what is best, create laws and systems that serve them, and create a morality that serves their vested interests.

Pope Francis’s focus is on the good of all peoples, particularly the large number of the powerless, those on the periphery, the ignored, and the forgotten of the world. He addresses the problems ranging from nationalism to the throwaway culture of a throwaway world, from populism to hunger and trafficking, from insufficient universal human rights to flawed globalization, from migration to the inability to carefully listen to each other. The basic verdict in Pope Francis’s assessment is that the world has serious problems, and that these problems are created on two levels. The first level is the lack of respect for the human rights and dignity of all persons and cultures. The second is the intentional and selfish exploitation of people, cultures, laws, technology, and systems by those who wield power and authority. This includes people with vested interests and those who are guided by ideologies.

Despite these dark clouds, Pope Francis promises to take up and discuss many “new paths of hope” (FT 54) for our “wounded world” (FT 67). Pope Francis invites us to dream. He says, “Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all” (FT 8).

Religions are called to the service of fraternity in the world (chap. 8). From our openness to the Father of all, we recognize our universal condition as brothers. For Christians, the source of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, from which our actions and commitments are born.

20 December | POLITICAL FOUNDATION

Reflecting on “Go and do likewise,” Pope Francis places a special responsibility on families as the “first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for other are lived out and handed on” (FT 114). Pope Francis believes that such world cannot happen without the dialogue, which is accomplished through consensus building, mutual respect, and truthful discussions. Towards the same end, Pope Francis places great emphasis on “recovering kindness” (FT 222-224). Kindness—as described by Paul in Galatians 5:22—Pope Francis says, “opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn all bridges” (FT 224).

There are three things that are essential if we want dialogue, and ultimately peace and reconciliation: truth, justice, and mercy. Here again, Pope Francis’s humanism comes to the fore. Peace would require, he says, “to place at the center of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys highest dignity, and respect for the common good” (FT 232). To accomplish this, truth, justice, and mercy are uncompromisable.

In the very last chapter, Pope assigns a special role to religion. He believes that all religions, “based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building human fraternity and defending justice in society” (FT 271). While religion can become a tool for violence and terrorism in hands of unconscionable people, he invites people of all religions to return to that which is basic to all faith traditions: “worship of God and love for our neighbor” (FT 282).

In these words, Pope Francis finds the hope and the solution to the problems of our wounded world. Hope lies—as he lays out in the beginning—in rebuilding a society of fraternity and social friendship; in “humanism inspired by faith” (FT 86), and in love, truth, justice, and mercy.

In this way, in the name of God, in the name of innocent human life, in the name of the poor, destitute and marginalized, in the name of orphans, widows, and refugees, in the name of all victims of wars, persecutions, and injustice, in the name of the weak, those who live in fear, prisoners of war and those tortured in any part of the world, in the name of peoples who have lost their security, in the name of human fraternity, in the name of freedom, in the name of justice and mercy, in the name of persons of goodwill, and in the name of God, Pope Francis ends his masterpiece encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*.

21 December | MORAL/ETHICAL FOUNDATION

As is typical of Pope Francis, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is at the center Fratelli Tutti. In particular, he uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to propose a solution for our wounded world. Pope Francis gives numerous reasons for making the Good Samaritan the hero of his encyclical. It would be impossible to include them all here. However, let me point out a few.

First, Pope Francis says that this parable answers Genesis' age-old question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Jesus was asked a similar question thousands of years later: "And who is my neighbor?" The parable of the Good Samaritan and his love-centered action is the Pope's answer to these questions (FT 57). Second, the most valuable point of the story is that "the Samaritan became a neighbor to the wounded Judean. To do so, the Samaritan had to cross all cultural and historical barriers" (FT 81). Pope Francis says, "Jesus trusts in the best of the human spirit; with the parable [of the Good Samaritan], he encourages us to persevere in love, to restore the dignity of the suffering, and to build a society worthy of the name" (FT 71).

Finally, as Pope Francis says, "This encounter of mercy between and Samaritan and a Jew is highly provocative; it leaves no room for ideological manipulation and challenges us to expand our frontiers. It gives a universal dimension to our call to love, one that transcends all prejudices, historical and cultural barriers, all petty interests" (FT 83). So, in the end, Pope Francis calls for a "humanism inspired by faith" (FT 86) as the foundation for a better world. Holding up the image of the Good Samaritan he invites us teach and preach about "the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction about the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters" (FT 86).

"The root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of rights that no one may violate – no individual, group, class, nation or state. Not even the majority of the social body may violate these rights, by going against the minority."

"To talk about fraternity as a disposition or value is to talk about how you view and relate to other people, including strangers and those who may be very different from you. It is about recognizing intrinsic familial ties with all people and creatures."

22 December | SOCIAL FOUNDATION

While the encyclical is far-reaching in the many aspects of social life it speaks on, its unifying theme is the proposal of “universal fraternity and social friendship” in response to “present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others.” In response to “reductive anthropological visions” the encyclical argues that social friendship is a recurring human vocation, taken up anew in each generation and never guaranteed without effort, intelligence, and a love that is willing to sacrifice for the common good.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is the scriptural heart of the encyclical. In his reading of it, Pope Francis discerns a set of human types that provide the opportunity for an examination of conscience. The unnamed thieves who set upon the Judean man are presented as the prior, structural, and often unknown causes of the violence and neglect we see around us today. The priest and the Levite are by-standers and passers-by who challenge the Christian to recognize that, “a believer may be untrue to everything that his faith demands of him, and yet think he is close to God and better than others.” These men illustrate the inveterate human reality “that we are constantly tempted to ignore others.” The Samaritan is the person able to understand that the wounded stranger is also a neighbor. He teaches us that, “love does not care if a brother or sister in need comes from one place or another.”

The parable is a narrative image of Christian friendship and what it demands. The friend is the person “who approaches others...to help them become ever more fully themselves.” For the Christian, such fraternal friendship is rooted, ultimately, in divine filiation: because we are all children of God, we are all brothers and sisters. The encyclical proposes a “redemptive anthropology” as an antidote to the “reductive anthropologies” characteristic of our modern age. The basic category of this redemptive anthropology is not the “individual” but the “person.” An “individual” is identified by distinction from others, whereas a “person” is an identity-in-relation: “The human person, with his or her inalienable rights, is by nature open to relationship.” Without such an anthropological vision, Pope Francis warns, we can only be “associates” never “neighbors.” Such associations are based on extrinsic criteria and goals and, therefore, are never an adequate basis for securing the deep equality that can only be, “the result of the conscious and careful cultivation of fraternity.” This anthropology of Christian friendship argues for an openness to others that breaks down the “walls” that “radical individualism” places between us and the stranger.

23 December | MISSION FOUNDATION

Cardinal Tagle highlighted that the Encyclical calls us to take notice of the current signs in the world today, especially a lack of brotherhood and sisterhood. It also calls us to be honest in declaring that these signs are “often hidden” and “clothed beautifully in order to hide the destruction that is happening in the human family.”

“We should be attentive to how the poor, the forgotten, the neglected are all the more suffering in this throwaway culture,” which happens within a mentality and context of “being closed” to others.

These signs are visible, he said, “from the perspective of the poor” including the migrants, women, the girl child, victims of human trafficking, among others.

The Cardinal noted that a fundamental part of the Pope’s vision of a world open to brotherhood and sisterhood is universal love, and said that only through it can we make social friendship possible.

“Universal love is openness to the other as opposed to being closed in on oneself – on my group, on my family, on my culture on my community... Love is a form of seeking union with others. Love sees the value of the others; love celebrates the worth of the others... Love sees what is best for others.”

It is different from mere romanticism or idealism, Cardinal Tagle affirmed: “This is how God loves! This is how God has manifested Himself! This is how Jesus loves and even died for all! This is how the Spirit blows! God who is love is total, full openness.

Cardinal Tagle warned that universal love without genuine response risks remaining a mere concept or a slogan.

Response, he continued, keeps the tension between the specific concrete person and the common dignity of all human beings. Because “you cannot enter the dignity of all human beings without entering into concrete, specific human beings.”

He noted that the Pope speaks of social friendship – applying it to local cultures which should be developed and appreciated but must be open to universal solidarity which does not eliminate the uniqueness of every culture.

Cardinal Tagle went on to note that social friendship can be made concrete in dealing with private property for example, pointing out that property should never be absolutized at the expense of the common good. He also noted that social friendship can inspire national politics and political charity in international relations, guiding countries against the trap of populism and the misuse of the people to promote narrow ideologies and agendas that create division.

24 December | SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

Pope Francis spends the greater part of “Fratelli Tutti” describing what is disfiguring the human family. Ideologies of economic self-interest dominate the common good. Public conversation and communication are being poisoned. There continues to be many forms of discrimination. There is a widespread disrespect for vulnerable human beings.

Pope Francis calls for fraternity and social friendship. He deplores selfishness and hostility in the response to the crises of our time. The first words of the encyclical are part of a quotation from St. Francis of Assisi, in which he commends a fraternity that crosses all boundaries of distance and culture as central to his followers. Pope Francis calls for social friendship — social respect for persons, and for the common good over individual interests in social, economic and institutional relationships. These flow from an attitude of fraternity.

Pope Francis cites the parable of the Good Samaritan with its emphasis on practical friendship for the wounded stranger. He describes this bridge of fraternity in terms of the central principles of Catholic Social Teaching: respect for human beings for their intrinsic value and not for their use, solidarity based on their social nature, and the primacy of the common good. “Fratelli Tutti” also calls for reform of political life based on respect for persons, respect for law and for human rights, and attention to the common good, rather than to individual and sectional interests.

The way in which we set about rebuilding society in the face of the coronavirus pandemic will be crucial. Its outcome will depend on whether we choose individual greed or commitment to the common good.

The encyclical strongly endorses the human rights of people made vulnerable by society — of women and children, of racial minorities, of refugees, of the elderly, and others. It views the public conversation about rights as one of engagement and persuasion in seeking the common good, not as a closed and adversarial struggle between allies and enemies.

“Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.” Despite the disfigurement of our time and the dangers we face, there is still a founded hope that the grace of God will bring about a future of goodwill and fraternity, where peace and love prevail.

25 December | INCARNATION FOUNDATION

Pope Francis calls each of us to live in this grace of the Holy Spirit, to be healers. This does not happen on our own. God assists us in our daily walk. The virtues of faith, hope, and charity are the divine virtues, operations of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In particular, Pope Francis reflects on the virtue of love during the General Audience on September 9, 2020. He concludes his reflections stating: “It is therefore time to improve our social love – I want to highlight this: our social love – with everyone’s contribution, starting from our littleness. The common good requires everyone’s participation. If everyone contributes his or her part, and if no one is left out, we can regenerate good relationships on the community, national and international level and even in harmony with the environment (cf. LS, 236). Thus, through our gestures, even the most humble ones, something of the image of God we bear within us will be made visible, because God is the Trinity, God is love. This is the most beautiful definition of God that is in the Bible. The Apostle John, who loved Jesus so much, gives it to us. With His help, we can heal the world working all together for the common good, not only for our own good but for the common good of all.” This sense of love, this love for our neighbors is at the very heart of the Christian message, God loves each of us even in our sinfulness. God calls each of us into relationship. This love calls all of us to perfection. The Pope reminds us that we are participating in the work of God through healing. Today, our world is fractious. Today, we experience pain and isolation. Today, we face fears of alienation. Let us renew our embrace of this core message of love. Let us embrace the human dignity of every person, especially those who are different from us. Let us avoid division and rancor. Here at the Catholic University of America, already years ago, we have taken a pledge that seeks to fulfill this vision of hope, oriented towards increasing the bonds of community.

The naming of God as our kin, and ourselves as kin and kind in this image, is love-language. There are other ways of naming God. But the message Pope Francis wishes us to hear for this moment is that we are made fully human by what draws us beyond ourselves. What makes this possible is a divine love, open to all, that births, bonds, bridges and endlessly renews. This love cannot be erased or disposed of, and it is the basis of Pope Francis’s call to us with St Francis’s words of loving attention: ‘Fratelli tutti’.

It is an opportunity to sustain hope in the encounter and recognition, as a deeper aspiration that allows us to fraternize with each other.

01 January | MARY, MISSIO AND FRATELLI TUTTI

In explaining and describing who Mary is, we discover that some of the roles or functions which Mary performs towards the mission of the Church are inherent in her titles. For instance, in explaining the title of Mary as Advocate, we discover that she intercedes for the Church. Thus, we may simply summarize that Our Lady performs her roles in the mission of the Church mainly as Mother of the Church, among other roles.

At this juncture, permit me to single out one very important role, if you like, a key role, performed by Mary with respect to our salvation. It is the role of obedience to God's will, which is theologically referred to as her *fiat*: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). This particular *fiat* forms the foundation of all other functions or roles which the Blessed Virgin Mary carried out in her lifetime. This role is not just for the benefit of the Church alone, but for the benefit of the whole human race. Indeed, Mary's *fiat* has changed the whole of human history. All other roles are subordinate to this particular one.

Catholic Theology holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary is next in rank after the Blessed Trinity. In other words, she occupies the Fourth Position in the whole of creation, indeed, in both heaven and earth. Mary occupies in the Church "the highest place and closest to us after Christ." Her dignity far surpasses the dignities of all the angels and saints put together. That is perhaps why St. Albert the Great remarks that, "Mary could not be more closely united with God, without becoming God!" St. Peter Damian advises the human race, saying "Let every creature keep silence and tremble, hardly daring to consider the immensity of so great a dignity; God dwells in the Blessed Virgin and has with her the identity of one nature!"

The Second Vatican Council deliberated elaborately on the relationship between Mary and the Church, especially as regards salvation history. Precisely the eighth Chapter of the document *Lumen Gentium* highlights the doctrinal synthesis and formulation of doctrine about the Blessed Virgin Mary within the context of the mystery of Christ and of the Church. By so doing, the Council, "stressed that the Mother of the Lord is not a peripheral figure in our faith and in the panorama of theology; rather, she, through her intimate participation in the history of salvation, in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 65).

For Christ, and therefore also for the Church, God willed and predestined the Virgin Mary from all eternity. Mary of Nazareth is, "hailed as a pre-eminent and altogether singular member of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 53) because of the gifts of grace which adorn her and because of the place she occupies in the Mystical Body. She is Mother of the Church, since she is Mother of him who, from the first moment of the Incarnation in her virginal womb, unites himself as Head of his Mystical Body which is the Church.