

From the Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity
Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth
Reflection for Election 2020 – October 9, 2020

In his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, signed on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis gives us a perfect “voter’s guide.” It’s also a perfect “citizen’s guide” as it provides a compelling vision of the world for which we should be advocating – no matter who wins elections on November 3. This week, we offer for your discernment some quotes from *Fratelli Tutti* which, we hope, will whet your appetite to read the full encyclical and fire your energy to live its vision.

15. The best way to dominate and gain control over people is to spread despair and discouragement, even under the guise of defending certain values. Today, in many countries, hyperbole, extremism and polarization have become political tools. Employing a strategy of ridicule, suspicion and relentless criticism, in a variety of ways one denies the right of others to exist or to have an opinion. Their share of the truth and their values are rejected and, as a result, the life of society is impoverished and subjected to the hubris of the powerful. Political life no longer has to do with healthy debates about long-term plans to improve people’s lives and to advance the common good, but only with slick marketing techniques primarily aimed at discrediting others. In this craven exchange of charges and countercharges, debate degenerates into a permanent state of disagreement and confrontation.

30. In today’s world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat. This illusion, unmindful of the great fraternal values, leads to “a sort of cynicism. For that is the temptation we face if we go down the road of disenchantment and disappointment... Isolation and withdrawal into one’s own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes”

41. I realize that some people are hesitant and fearful with regard to migrants. I consider this part of our natural instinct of self-defense. Yet it is also true that an individual and a people are only fruitful and productive if they are able to develop a creative openness to others. I ask everyone to move beyond those primal reactions because “there is a problem when doubts and fears condition our way of thinking and acting to the point of making us intolerant, closed and perhaps even – without realizing it – racist. In this way, fear deprives us of the desire and the ability to encounter the other”.

86. I sometimes wonder why, in light of this, it took so long for the Church unequivocally to condemn slavery and various forms of violence. Today, with our developed spirituality and theology, we have no excuses. Still, there are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different. Faith, and the humanism it inspires, must maintain a critical sense in the face of these tendencies, and prompt an immediate response whenever they rear their head. For this reason, it is important that catechesis and preaching 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.

118. The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of color, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development.

168. The marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem, however much we are asked to believe this dogma of neoliberal faith. Whatever the challenge, this impoverished and repetitive school of thought always offers the same recipes. Neoliberalism simply reproduces itself by resorting to the magic theories of “spillover” or “trickle” – without using the name – as the only solution to societal problems. There is little appreciation of the fact that the alleged “spillover” does not resolve the inequality that gives rise to new forms of violence threatening the fabric of society.

180. Recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian. It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity. For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the “field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity”.[165] This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity.[166] Once more, I appeal for a renewed appreciation of politics as “a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good”

276. For these reasons, the Church, while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the contrary, “she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines” in the building of a better world, or fail to “reawaken the spiritual energy” that can contribute to the betterment of society.[266] It is true that religious ministers must not engage in the party politics that are the proper domain of the laity, but neither can they renounce the political dimension of life itself,[267] which involves a constant attention to the common good

and a concern for integral human development. The Church “has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities”. She works for “the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity”.[268] She does not claim to compete with earthly powers, but to offer herself as “a family among families, this is the Church, open to bearing witness in today’s world, open to faith hope and love for the Lord and for those whom he loves with a preferential love. A home with open doors. The Church is a home with open doors, because she is a mother”.[269] And in imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, “we want to be a Church that serves, that 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 the sign of unity... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation”.[

Deeper Dive: Read, pray, reflect, share on the entire encyclical

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

Prayer:

A Litany of Lament from the Baltimore Carmel

Deliver us from...

Racism and white supremacy

Discrimination toward people of color

The killing of black men, random shooting/killing of black children and black women

Gun violence and school shootings

Violence against women and children

Violence against LGBTQ people

The cruelty of human trafficking

The failure of political and religious leadership in our country

The danger to our democracy from a dictatorship mentality

The political enmity existing in our country

A culture of dishonesty and fake news

The great danger to humanity inherent in the continuing nuclear arms race

O God, our hearts are full of sorrows of the world. We carry in our souls the suffering of our sisters and brothers. We pray in lament day after day for the grace of your mercy and compassion to embrace and transform human hearts and so change the course of the world.