

A resource of 9 sessions
for a slow reading of

Fratelli Tutti

Session One:
The Introduction



An overview and a context

Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship is the third part of a trilogy of writings by Pope Francis. First, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*Joy of the Gospel*) focuses on repairing the Church. Next, *Laudato Si'* (*Praised Be*) examines repairing the planet. Now, *Fratelli Tutti* (*Brothers and Sisters All*) explores building a culture of peace and dialogue in order to work together to care for each other.

Over eight chapters Pope Francis offers a remedy against self-destruction and despair, which includes an openness to love, charity, and kindness, and a rejection of war, nuclear weapons and the death penalty. Like *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti* is a social encyclical, where the pope applies the moral teachings of the Church to the social and economic challenges of the current day. Also like *Laudato Si'*, this encyclical is inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi, who responded to the Church and the world in his time, and is structured using the three-part See-Judge-Act method.



This Resource provides material for 9 sessions - one for each of the principal sections of *Fratelli Tutti*. It provides

- a summary and complete text of each section/chapter
- discussion questions based on key paragraphs of the section/chapter
- additional materials - song, art, poetry, for example - to accompany the reading and provide complementary ways of responding to its themes.

A Summary of *Fratelli Tutti*'s 'Introduction'

It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women (8).

From the very first words of this encyclical — this pastoral letter to the Church and to the world — Pope Francis teaches us the way of St. Francis of Assisi, who called all people his brothers and sisters (*fratelli tutti*), and was a “saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy” who inspired this encyclical, as he did *Laudato Si'*.

By calling for a love that “transcends the barriers of geography and distance” and by crossing Crusade lines to meet with the Sultan of Egypt, St. Francis demonstrated his openness of heart and commitment to peace at a time of great power struggles and violence – not unlike today.

Just as St. Francis sought to live in harmony with all, Pope Francis calls us to value fratern-

nity and friendship across all boundaries and division, as he and the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb demonstrated when they signed the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

While Pope Francis started writing this encyclical before the pandemic, the urgency of his teaching on fraternity became even more clear given the inability of countries to work together to resolve yet another problem that affects us all. Anyone who thinks the only lesson to learn from this time is to improve or reform current systems “is denying reality,” the pope says. We need something more, a rebirth of “universal aspiration to fraternity.”

Introduction

1. “*FRATELLI TUTTI*”.^[1] With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. 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”.^[2] In his simple and direct way, Saint 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.

2. This saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy, who inspired me to write the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, prompts me once more to devote this new Encyclical to fraternity and social friendship. Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters.

Without Borders

3. There is an episode in the life of Saint Francis that shows his openness of heart, which knew no bounds and transcended differences of

origin, nationality, colour or religion. It was his visit to Sultan Malik-el-Kamil, in Egypt, which entailed considerable hardship, given Francis' poverty, his scarce resources, the great distances to be travelled and their differences of language, culture and religion. That journey, undertaken at the time of the Crusades, further demonstrated the breadth and grandeur of his love, which sought to embrace everyone. Francis' fidelity to his Lord was commensurate with his love for his brothers and sisters. Unconcerned for the hardships and dangers involved, Francis went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: if they found themselves “among the Saracens and other nonbelievers”, without renouncing their own identity they were not to “engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake”.^[3] In the context of the times, this was an extraordinary recommendation. We are impressed that some eight hundred years ago Saint Francis urged that all forms of hostility or conflict be avoided and that a humble and fraternal “subjection” be shown to those who did not share his faith.

4. Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God. He understood that “God is love and those who abide in love abide in God” (1 Jn 4:16). In this way, he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society. Indeed, “only the man who approaches others, not to draw them into his own life, but to help them become



ever more fully themselves, can truly be called a father”. [4] In the world of that time, bristling with watchtowers and defensive walls, cities were a theatre of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading through the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. He became one of the poor and sought to live in harmony with all. Francis has inspired these pages.

5. Issues of human fraternity and social friendship have always been a concern of mine. In recent years, I have spoken of them repeatedly and in different settings. In this Encyclical, I have sought to bring together many of those statements and to situate them in a broader context of reflection. In the preparation of *Laudato Si'*, I had a source of inspiration in my brother Bartholomew, the Orthodox Patriarch, who has spoken forcefully of our need to care for creation. In this case, I have felt particularly encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, with whom I met in Abu Dhabi, where we declared that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters”. [5] This was no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment. The present Encyclical takes up and develops some of the great themes raised in the Document that we both signed. I have also incorporated, along with my own thoughts, a number of letters, documents and considerations that I have received from many individuals and groups throughout the world.

6. The following pages do not claim to offer a complete teaching on fraternal love, but rather to consider its universal scope, its openness to every man and woman. I offer this social Encyclical as a modest contribution to continued reflection, in the hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words. Although I have written it from the Christian convictions that inspire and sustain me, I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will.

7. As I was writing this letter, the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a

fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.

8. It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. “Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together”. [6] Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers 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.

Pope Francis

[1] Admonitions, 6, 1. English translation in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol 1., New York, London, Manila (1999), 131.

[2] Ibid., 25: op. cit., 136.

[3] SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, Earlier Rule of the Friars Minor (Regula non bullata), 16: 3.6: op. cit. 74.

[4] ELOI LECLERC, O.F.M., Exil et tendresse, Éd. Franciscaines, Paris, 1962, 205.

[5] Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi (4 February 2019): L'Osservatore Romano, 4-5 February 2019, p. 6.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

- What have you heard about *Fratelli Tutti*?
- What made you want to give time in order to read it?
- Why you decide to read it with others?
- What do you think is important about St Francis (if you happen to know anything much about him!)
- What do you think is effective at promoting awareness of human dignity? What has the effect of trying to diminish human dignity.

Leaven for the Lump

- The Kurt Well/Maxwell Anderson Song *Lost in the Stars* gives voice to the experience of human beings separated from the original blessing of creation, lost and alone, needing to be found and brought home.

A classic interpretation can be found here:
<https://bit.ly/3jUb8w5>

- The following poem by Emily Dickinson urges us to hope and trust in the better:

**If my Bark sink
'Tis to another sea —
Mortality's Ground Floor
Is Immortality.**



Acknowledgements

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Page 3. Fresco of St Francis and the Sultan by Giotto di Bondone. Found at <https://bit.ly/2FpGdc8>

Page 4 Poem by Emily Dickinson from selection by Peter Washington (Everyman's Library, 1993.); Photograph © 2014, Allen Morris, Basilica of St Francis, Assisi.

From A Document On Human Fraternity For World Peace And Living Together

We affirm ... the importance of awakening religious awareness and the need to revive this awareness in the hearts of new generations through sound education and an adherence to moral values and upright religious teachings. In this way we can confront tendencies that are individualistic, selfish, conflicting, and also address radicalism and blind extremism in all its forms and expressions.

The first and most important aim of religions is to believe in God, to honour Him and to invite all men and women to believe that this universe depends on a God who governs it. He is the Creator who has formed us with His divine wisdom and has granted us the gift of life to protect it. It is a gift that no one has the right to take away, threaten or manipulate to suit oneself. Indeed, everyone must safeguard this gift of life from its beginning up to its natural end. We therefore condemn all those practices that are a threat to life such as genocide, acts of terrorism, forced displacement, human organ trafficking, abortion and euthanasia. We likewise condemn the policies that promote these practices.

Moreover, we resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women in order to make them act in a way that has nothing to do with the truth of religion. This is done for the purpose of achieving objectives that are political, economic, worldly and short-sighted. We thus call upon all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression. We ask this on the basis of our common belief in God who did not create men and women to be killed or to fight one another, nor to be tortured or humiliated in their lives and circumstances. God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorize people.

Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019

His Holiness
Pope Francis

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar
Ahmad Al-Tayyeb

Full text at <https://bit.ly/30Y1BNk>