



A Journey Through Advent with Fratelli Tutti

**All Brothers and Sisters:
On Fraternity and Social Friendship**



Advent 2020

Cover Photo: Katarina Kabiriera SGS
Layout: Taabeia Ibouri SGS

The Season of Advent

The name Advent is taken from the Latin ‘adventus’, meaning ‘coming’. While its precise origins are unclear, Advent’s earliest appearance took the form of a three-week fast before Epiphany in the late 300s. After a number of modifications to its focus and duration, the first Sunday in Advent was declared the beginning of the liturgical year from around the ninth century.

Although being one of the shorter liturgical seasons, Advent offers singular opportunities for reflection. We are reminded in the Catechism that the waiting during Advent is twofold. We look back and recall the incarnation while remembering the promise that Christ will come again.

Similarly, the themes of the Sunday readings focus on the end of time, the ministry of John the Baptist, and the events preceding the birth of Jesus. The beautiful ‘O Antiphons’ also bring both fervour to the preparation for Christmas and a joyful conclusion to the season. Signifying the titles of Christ, the seven antiphons – O Wisdom, O Adonai, O Flower of Jesse, O Key of David, O Radiant Dawn, O Desire of Nations, O Emmanuel – are said to have been so ordered by the Benedictine monks, and have been part of a gentle rhythm of prayer for over 1000 years.

An Advent Prayer

In praise and thanksgiving,
let us rejoice as we await our Saviour,
Christ the Lord,
God-with-us,
Prince of peace.

For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him;
the Virgin Mary longed for him with love beyond all telling;

John the Baptist sang of his coming
and proclaimed his presence when he came.

It is by his gift that we already rejoice at the mystery of his nativity,
so that he may find us watchful in prayer
and exultant in his praise.

adapted from Advent Preface II¹

Advent and Fratelli Tutti

This booklet has been developed as a way for all Good Samaritans to journey through Advent personally, communally and as a congregation, while reflecting on Pope Francis' latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*.²

Fratelli Tutti (All Brothers and Sisters) is the third encyclical of Pope Francis, subtitled 'on fraternity and social friendship'. It calls for more human fraternity and solidarity, and is a plea to reject war and conflict. The document was signed on 3rd October 2020, during Pope Francis' visit to the tomb of his namesake, St Francis of Assisi, and was published the following day, the saint's feast day.

In Chapter Two of *Fratelli Tutti*, the Parable of the Good Samaritan is offered as a lens through which to interpret contemporary geopolitics. According to Pope Francis, the challenge the parable sets for political debate is clear: "The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project" (#69).

For each day throughout the season of Advent, a passage from Scripture is provided, along with an excerpt from *Fratelli Tutti*. These then lead gently into the reflections. We read God's word in prayer, asking that it enlighten and renew us. You may wish to take some time in silence to reflect upon how God is speaking to you through the text. Responding to some of the following questions may be helpful:

In reflecting on my life:

- What is God asking me to listen to in this reading?
- Where is God directing and leading me?

In reflecting on my community and the wider world:

- What is God asking of me at this time?
- What does God invite me to attend to in my community and world?

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37



Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay whatever you spend.” Which of these three, do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Parable of the Good Samaritan and Fratelli Tutti

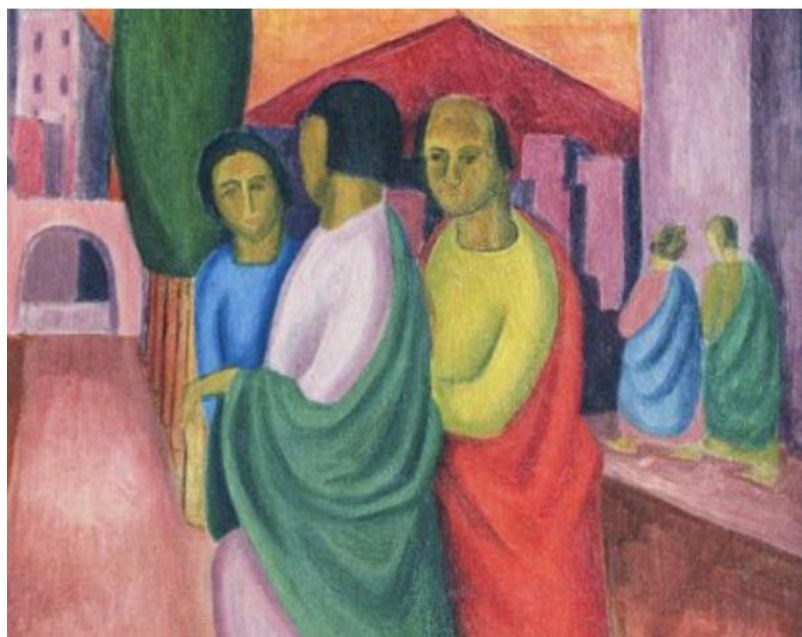
Chapter One of *Fratelli Tutti* is entitled 'Dark Clouds over a Closed World'. These shadows are spreading everywhere, leaving injured people by the roadside, cast out and discarded. The shadows plunge humanity into confusion, loneliness, and desolation.

In Chapter Two, there is a 'Stranger on the Road' wounded and cast aside amid the dark clouds of the closed world. Faced with the reality of the injured stranger there are two attitudes we can take: we can pass by on the other side, or we can stop and be moved by pity. The type of person we are or the type of political, social, or religious movement we belong to will be determined by whether we embrace the injured stranger or abandon him or her.

Pope Francis offers us the parable of the Good Samaritan as a ray of light in the darkness (#56). We are encouraged to create a different culture, one in which we resolve our conflicts, care for one another (#57) and uphold the inalienable dignity of each human person.

We are moved and called to expand our hearts to embrace the outsider; the one who is different. It is a call to fraternal love that extends from the oldest text of the Bible to the New Testament (#61).

Love does not care if a wounded brother or sister comes from one place or another. Love shatters chains and builds bridges; it enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home. Love exudes compassion and dignity (#62).³



A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

An Ecumenical Christian Prayer

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.

(Prayers from Fratelli Tutti)



Sunday 29th November First Sunday of Advent⁴

From the Scriptures

Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come.
(Mark 13:35)

From Fratelli Tutti

Abandoned on the wayside

Jesus tells the story of a man assaulted by thieves and lying injured on the wayside. Several persons passed him by, but failed to stop. These were people holding important social positions, yet lacking in real concern for the common good. They would not waste a couple of minutes caring for the injured man, or even in calling for help. Only one person stopped, approached the man and cared for him personally, even spending his own money to provide for his needs. He also gave him something that in our frenetic world we cling to tightly: he gave him his time. Certainly, he had his own plans for that day, his own needs, commitments and desires. Yet he was able to put all that aside when confronted with someone in need. Without even knowing the injured man, he saw him as deserving of his time and attention. (#63)

Reflection

God invites us to actively and effectively participate in making the kingdom a reality in our world. It takes great daily courage to take these words to heart but when we do, our lives, our often very humble lives, attain a meaning and depth that cannot come from human sources.⁵ We pray for the courage to respond generously with our time and attention to those who have been abandoned on the wayside.



Monday 30th November First Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

And he said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' And they left their nets at once and followed him.
(Matthew 4:19)

From Fratelli Tutti

Abandoned on the wayside

Which of these persons do you identify with? This question, blunt as it is, is direct and incisive. Which of these characters do you resemble? We need to acknowledge that we are constantly tempted to ignore others, especially the weak. Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made, we are still “illiterate” when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies. We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, ignoring situations until they affect us directly. (#64)

Reflection

We too, are called to announce the Good News. We may feel we lack the knowledge, the charisma or the education to convey our faith, to influence people, to change their lives. That doesn't matter. In doing ordinary things with joy and grace we become proclaimers of the Good News. We pray for the strength to proclaim the Good News through our actions as well through as our many words.



Tuesday 1st December First Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Happy the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see and never saw it; to hear what you hear and never heard it.
(Luke 10:24)

From Fratelli Tutti

Abandoned on the wayside

Someone is assaulted on our streets, and many hurry off as if they did not notice. People hit someone with their car and then flee the scene. Their only desire is to avoid problems; it does not matter that, through their fault, another person could die. All these are signs of an approach to life that is spreading in various and subtle ways. What is more, caught up as we are with our own needs, the sight of a person who is suffering disturbs us. It makes us uneasy, since we have no time to waste on other people's problems. These are symptoms of an unhealthy society. A society that seeks prosperity but turns its back on suffering. (#65)

Reflection

The season of Advent is a joyful season as we wait expectantly for the coming of the Saviour. Let us pray in hope that we will experience the joy of this season, and communicate it to others we meet along the wayside through our words, actions and demeanour.



Wednesday 2nd December First Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them off hungry, they might collapse on the way'.
(Matthew 15:32)

From Fratelli Tutti

Abandoned on the wayside

May we not sink to such depths! Let us look to the example of the Good Samaritan. 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. This summons is ever new, yet it is grounded in a fundamental law of our being: we are called to direct society to the pursuit of the common good and, with this purpose in mind, to persevere in consolidating its political and social order, its fabric of relations, its human goals. By his actions, the Good Samaritan showed that "the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions" (#66)

Reflection

May we take comfort in knowing that there is no place on this earth that is God-forsaken. In any circumstances - in the peak experiences on the mountain top and challenging valley experiences - our God is with us. We pray that we may recognise God in all things and in all people.



Thursday 3rd December First Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Jesus said to his disciples: 'It is not those who say to me, "Lord, Lord", who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven.
(Matthew 7:21)

From Fratelli Tutti

Abandoned on the wayside

The parable eloquently presents the basic decision we need to make in order to rebuild our wounded world. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan. Any other decision would make us either one of the robbers or one of those who walked by without showing compassion for the sufferings of the man on the roadside. The parable shows us how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbours, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good. At the same time, it warns us about the attitude of those who think only of themselves and fail to shoulder the inevitable responsibilities of life as it is. (#67)

Reflection

The season of Advent is a time to reflect deeply on rebuilding our hurting world, to form a community of women and men who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject a society of exclusion, and who act instead as neighbours. We pray that we may assist in lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good.



Friday 4th December First Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Then he touched their eyes saying, 'Your faith deserves it, so let this be done for you.' And their sight returned.
(Matthew 9:29)

From Fratelli Tutti

Abandoned on the wayside

The parable clearly does not indulge in abstract moralising, nor is its message merely social and ethical. It speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love. We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity. (#68)

Reflection

Advent reminds us to keep alert, waiting and longing in faith and hope. We pray in that we will be both challenged and changed by this faith and hope, and that we will be blessed by God's goodness and love in our efforts to emerge from our blindness complacency.



Saturday 5th December First Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils.
(Matthew 10:8)

From Fratelli Tutti

A story constantly retold

The parable is clear and straightforward, yet it also evokes the interior struggle that each of us experiences as we gradually come to know ourselves through our relationships with our brothers and sisters. Sooner or later, we will all encounter a person who is suffering. Today there are more and more of them. The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders. And if we extend our gaze to the history of our own lives and that of the entire world, all of us are, or have been, like each of the characters in the parable. All of us have in ourselves something of the wounded man, something of the robber, something of the passers-by, and something of the Good Samaritan. (#69)

Reflection

The heart of Jesus continues to be moved with pity for all who suffer. We are summoned to be agents of this healing. We pray that our political, social and religious leaders consider inclusion over exclusion in decisions relating to those lying wounded along the roadside.



Sunday 6th December Second Sunday of Advent

From the Scriptures

Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the wilderness: prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight, and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

(Mark 1:2-4)

From Fratelli Tutti

A story constantly retold

It is remarkable how the various characters in the story change, once confronted by the painful sight of the poor man on the roadside. The distinctions between Judean and Samaritan, priest and merchant, fade into insignificance. Now there are only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by; those who bend down to help and those who look the other way and hurry off. Here, all our distinctions, labels and masks fall away: it is the moment of truth. Will we bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others? Will we bend down and help another to get up? This is today's challenge, and we should not be afraid to face it. In moments of crisis, decisions become urgent. It could be said that, here and now, anyone who is neither a robber nor a passer-by is either injured himself or bearing an injured person on his shoulders. (#70)

Reflection

The season of Advent prepares us to celebrate God's coming to us as a babe at Bethlehem and encourages us to look forward to Christ's final coming in glory. May we be messengers of peace in our attitudes and actions as we bend down and help another to get up.



Monday 7th December Second Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Some people appeared, carrying on a bed a paralysed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front of him. But as the crowd made it impossible to find a way of getting him in, they went up on to the flat roof and lowered him and his stretcher down through the tiles into the middle of the gathering, in front of Jesus.

(Luke 5:18-19)

From Fratelli Tutti

A story constantly retold

The story of the Good Samaritan is constantly being repeated. We can see this clearly as social and political inertia is turning many parts of our world into a desolate byway, even as domestic and international disputes and the robbing of opportunities are leaving great numbers of the marginalised stranded on the roadside. In his parable, Jesus does not offer alternatives; he does not ask what might have happened had the injured man or the one who helped him yielded to anger or a thirst for revenge. Jesus trusts in the best of the human spirit; with this parable, he encourages us to persevere in love, to restore dignity to the suffering and to build a society worthy of the name. (#71)

Reflection

The paralysed man in today's Gospel was unable to go to Jesus on his own. Today's readings invite us to bring people to Jesus, just as the Good Samaritan took the wounded man to where he would get help and healing. Through prayer and practical kindness, may we bring peace and love to the lives of the wounded, the vulnerable and the marginalised.



Tuesday 8th December Second Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

‘I am the handmaid of the Lord,’ said Mary, ‘let what you have said be done to me’. And the angel left her.
(Luke 1:38)

From Fratelli Tutti

The characters in the story

The parable begins with the robbers. Jesus chose to start when the robbery has already taken place, lest we dwell on the crime itself or the thieves who committed it. Yet we know them well. We have seen, descending on our world, the dark shadows of neglect and violence in the service of petty interests of power, gain and division. The real question is this: will we abandon the injured man and run to take refuge from the violence, or will we pursue the thieves? Will the wounded man end up being the justification for our irreconcilable divisions, our cruel indifference, our intestine conflicts? (#72)

Reflection

Mary, like of us, still had to walk the way of faith, day by day, never knowing exactly what would happen next. May we follow Mary’s example of trust in God as we encounter difficult questions and decisions each day.



Wednesday 9th December Second Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Jesus exclaimed, 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, for I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

(Matthew 11: 28-30)

From Fratelli Tutti

The characters in the story

The parable then asks us to take a closer look at the passers-by. The nervous indifference that makes them pass to the other side of the road – whether innocently or not, whether the result of disdain or mere distraction – makes the priest and the Levite a sad reflection of the growing gulf between ourselves and the world around us. There are many ways to pass by at a safe distance: we can retreat inwards, ignore others, or be indifferent to their plight. Or simply look elsewhere, as in some countries, or certain sectors of them, where contempt is shown for the poor and their culture, and one looks the other way, as if a development plan imported from without could edge them out. This is how some justify their indifference: the poor, whose pleas for help might touch their hearts, simply do not exist. The poor are beyond the scope of their interest. (#73)

Reflection

How are you feeling at this moment? Are you tired and weary? Is your hope weak? Are you carrying too much yourself? Let us also consider the needs and the burdens of the poor. Let us entrust our burdens to God who never grows weary, that we in turn may help others carry their burdens, and not just stay focused on our own.



Thursday 10th December Second Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.

(Matthew 11:11)

From Fratelli Tutti

The characters in the story

One detail about the passers-by does stand out: they were religious, devoted to the worship of God: a priest and a Levite. This detail should not be overlooked. It shows that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God. 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. The guarantee of an authentic openness to God, on the other hand, is a way of practising the faith that helps open our hearts to our brothers and sisters. (#74)

Reflection

Today's Gospel invites us to reflect on the woman who gave birth to John the Baptist. As we are encouraged by the fruitfulness of Elizabeth, we humbly acknowledge the barren parts within ourselves and within our communities. May we follow Elizabeth's authentic openness to God, which helps to open our hearts to our brothers and sisters.



Friday 11th December Second Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'What description can I find for this generation?'
(Matthew 11:16)

From Fratelli Tutti

The characters in the story

"Robbers" usually find secret allies in those who "pass by and look the other way". There is a certain interplay between those who manipulate and cheat society, and those who, while claiming to be detached and impartial critics, live off that system and its benefits. There is a sad hypocrisy when the impunity of crime, the use of institutions for personal or corporate gain, and other evils apparently impossible to eradicate, are accompanied by a relentless criticism of everything, a constant sowing of suspicion that results in distrust and confusion. (#75)

Reflection

If the people had looked for the good in John the Baptist and Jesus they would have surely found it. But they were not interested in that. It is so easy to fall into the trap of seeing only the failings of the people we live, work and pray with. This relentless criticism of everything and a constant sowing of suspicion results in distrust and confusion. We pray today to recognise and acknowledge the goodness in those around us.



Saturday 12th December Second Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

I tell you that Elijah has come already and they did not recognise him, but treated him as they pleased; and the Son of Man will suffer similarly at their hand.'

(Matthew 17:10-13)

From Fratelli Tutti

The characters in the story

Let us turn at last to the injured man. There are times when we feel like him, badly hurt and left on side of the road. We can also feel helpless because our institutions are neglected and lack resources, or simply serve the interests of a few, without and within. Indeed, “globalized society often has an elegant way of shifting its gaze. Under the guise of being politically correct or ideologically fashionable, we look at those who suffer without touching them. We televise live pictures of them, even speaking about them with euphemisms and with apparent tolerance” (#76)

Reflection

We often feel helpless and neglected and left by the side of the road, yet we fail to recognise this in others, and we keep them at a distance. May our eyes be opened that we may see the transfigured face of Jesus in the people we encounter this day.



Sunday 13th December Third Sunday of Advent

From the Scriptures

... they put a further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water: but there stands among you – unknown to you, the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal strap.'
(John 1: 25-27)

From Fratelli Tutti

Starting anew

Each day offers us a new opportunity, a new possibility. We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies. Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. (#77)

Reflection

We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. To become adults, we have to learn that we are not the centre of the universe. We become adults when we learn to put God, and the well-being of others, at the centre of our lives and actions. Paradoxically, John the Baptist fulfilled an important role in preparing the way for the Lord because he knew that he was not the most important person.



Monday 14th December Third Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

...the oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man with far-seeing eyes, the oracle of the one who hears the word of God, of one who knows the knowledge of the Most High. He sees what Shaddai makes him see, receives the divine answer, and his eyes are opened.
(Numbers 24: 15-17)

From Fratelli Tutti

Starting anew

Like the chance traveller in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen. We may often find ourselves succumbing to the mentality of the violent, the blindly ambitious, those who spread mistrust and lies. Others may continue to view politics or the economy as an arena for their own power plays. For our part, let us foster what is good and place ourselves at its service. (#77 continuation)

Reflection

Today's readings are all about vision - learning to see the world as God sees it. Such vision is a gift, a gift often bestowed on the margins of the community. The season of Advent challenges us to be people of vision. As Christmas approaches, may we see the humble face of the star of Jacob, whether in the soon-to-be-born child, the homeless family, the migrant or the refugee.



Tuesday 15th December Third Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

John came to you, a pattern of righteousness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.

(Matthew 21:32)

From Fratelli Tutti

Starting anew

We can start from below and, case by case, act at the most concrete and local levels, and then expand to the farthest reaches of our countries and our world, with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man's injuries. Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, because there we will discover all the goodness that God has planted in human hearts. Difficulties that seem overwhelming are opportunities for growth, not excuses for a glum resignation that can lead only to acquiescence. (#78)

Reflection

Let us pray for the grace to deepen our trust in God who has drawn near to us. May we let go and let God's grace work among us. What we need to repent of may not be any evil actions, rather our inability to let God be God for us, to surrender ourselves to God's loving arms.



Wednesday 16th December Third Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Are you the one who is to come, or must we wait for someone else?
(Luke 7:19)

From Fratelli Tutti

Starting anew

The Samaritan who stopped along the way departed without expecting any recognition or gratitude. His effort to assist another person gave him great satisfaction in life and before his God, and thus became a duty. All of us have a responsibility for the wounded, those of our own people and all the peoples of the earth. Let us care for the needs of every man and woman, young and old, with the same fraternal spirit of care and closeness that marked the Good Samaritan. (#79)

Reflection

John was going through some sort of crisis of faith – and this is not unusual. Many saints have gone through similar ‘dark nights’, and on occasions, we will also. Without it, there can be no purifying and deepening of our faith and our understanding of our responsibility to the peoples of the earth.



Thursday 17th December Third Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.

(Matthew 1:17)

From Fratelli Tutti

Neighbours without borders

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to the question: Who is my neighbour? The word “neighbour”, in the society of Jesus’ time, usually meant those nearest us. It was felt that help should be given primarily to those of one’s own group and race. For some Jews of that time, Samaritans were looked down upon, considered impure. They were not among those to be helped. Jesus, himself a Jew, completely transforms this approach. He asks us not to decide who is close enough to be our neighbour, but rather that we ourselves become neighbours to all. (#80)

Reflection

The genealogy of Jesus tells us that God’s plan for salvation unfolded over many centuries and involved many people, both good and bad. This gives us hope in our present time, that although God’s plan may have been impeded on occasion by human evil, it has never been destroyed. The ultimate victory is always with the good and in recognising our neighbour in whatever circumstance prevails.



Friday 18th December Third Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Joseph, being a man of honour, and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally.

(Matthew 1:19)

From Fratelli Tutti

Neighbours without borders

Jesus asks us to be present to those in need of help, regardless of whether or not they belong to our social group. In this case, the Samaritan became a neighbour to the wounded Judean. By approaching and making himself present, he crossed all cultural and historical barriers. Jesus concludes the parable by saying: “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37). In other words, he challenges us to put aside all differences and, in the face of suffering, to draw near to others with no questions asked. I should no longer say that I have neighbours to help, but that I must myself be a neighbour to others. (#81)

Reflection

Today we pause to reflect on Joseph, the husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus, who fulfilled a vital role in God’s plan of salvation. Joseph was a just and compassionate man who sought to do the will of God in his life. We pray today, that we too, may be blessed with Joseph’s compassion and love in our response to being neighbour.



Saturday 19th December Third Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

When he came out he could not speak to them, and they realised he had received a vision in the sanctuary. But he could only make signs to them, and remained dumb.
(Luke 1: 20, 22)

From Fratelli Tutti

Neighbours without borders

The parable, though, is troubling, for Jesus says that the wounded man was a Judean, while the one who stopped and helped him was a Samaritan. This detail is quite significant for our reflection on a love that includes everyone. The Samaritans lived in a region where pagan rites were practised. For the Jews, this made them impure, detestable, dangerous. In fact, one ancient Jewish text referring to nations that were hated, speaks of Samaria as “not even a people” (Sir 50:25); it also refers to “the foolish people that live in Shechem” (50:26). (#82)

Reflection

What Zechariah needed more than anything else at that time was to be silent before the mystery of God. We too, need to find some time in the days leading up to Christmas to be silent before the mystery of the incarnation - the mystery of God who assumed our humanity, and exemplified a love that includes everyone.



Sunday 20th December Fourth Sunday of Advent

From the Scriptures

.....for nothing impossible to God 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.'
(Luke 1:38)

From Fratelli Tutti

Neighbours without borders

This explains why a Samaritan woman, when asked by Jesus for a drink, answered curtly: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jn 4:9). The most offensive charge that those who sought to discredit Jesus could bring was that he was "possessed" and "a Samaritan" (Jn 8:48). So this encounter of mercy between a 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, all historical and cultural barriers, all petty interests. (#83)

Reflection

Wherever and however God may speak to us, let us pray that we like Mary, may be able to give our 'fiat', our 'Yes'. Like Mary, we are called to practice a universal love that is able to overcome historical prejudices, cultural barriers, and petty interests.



Monday 21st December Fourth Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.
(Luke 1:39)

From Fratelli Tutti

The plea of the stranger

Finally, I would note that in another passage of the Gospel Jesus says: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). Jesus could speak those words because he had an open heart, sensitive to the difficulties of others. St Paul urges us to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). When our hearts do this, they are capable of identifying with others without worrying about where they were born or come from. In the process, we come to experience others as our "own flesh" (Is 58:7). (#84)

Reflection

Mary went simply to visit Elizabeth, to spend time with her. Her welcoming action reminds us that a good way to prepare for Christmas is to visit and keep in touch with people who are housebound, unwell, or lonely. They will be enriched and so will we.



Tuesday 22nd December Fourth Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

Mary said, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour.

(Luke 1:46-47)

From Fratelli Tutti

The plea of the stranger

For Christians, the words of Jesus have an even deeper meaning. They compel us to recognise Christ himself in each of our abandoned or excluded brothers and sisters (Mt 25:40-45). Faith has untold power to inspire and sustain our respect for others, for believers come to know that God loves every man and woman with infinite love and “thereby confers infinite dignity” upon all humanity. We likewise believe that Christ shed his blood for each of us and that no one is beyond the scope of his universal love. If we go to the ultimate source of that love which is the very life of the triune God, we encounter in the community of the three divine Persons the origin and perfect model of all life in society. Theology continues to be enriched by its reflection on this great truth. (#85)

Reflection

In response to Elizabeth’s joy-filled greeting, Mary bursts into praise for the wonders God is accomplishing through her. This faith has untold powers to inspire and sustain our respect for others.

A wonderful way for us to prepare for Christmas, as the year draws to a close, is to compose our own personal Magnificat—our personal song of praise to God for the blessings we have received during this year.



Wednesday 23rd December Fourth Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy.

(Luke 1:57-58)

From Fratelli Tutti

The plea of the stranger

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. (#86)

Reflection

Today we reflect on the kindness of God. Elizabeth's neighbours were full of praise 'that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness. The word 'kind' has connections with the word 'kin'. If we reach out and help such people, we are being kind to them. Literally, we are treating them as if they were our kin, our family. May we respect the inalienable dignity of each person and reach out in kindness to all our brothers and sisters - all our kin.



Thursday 24th December Fourth Week of Advent

From the Scriptures

.....to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

(Luke 1:79)

From Fratelli Tutti

The plea of the stranger

Human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop and find fulfilment except “in the sincere gift of self to others”. Nor can they fully know themselves apart from an encounter with other persons: “I communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with others”. No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others, without having real faces to love. This is part of the mystery of authentic human existence. “Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails”. (#87)

Reflection

May we take time today in the midst of all the last minute Christmas preparations to prepare a place in our hearts to welcome the birth of the Saviour. Just as Mary and Joseph sought refuge in Bethlehem, we remember tonight displaced persons and those seeking refuge and asylum. We ask your special blessings on those who have died throughout the year and pray that the birth of the Saviour may bring comfort and peace to their families and friends.



6

... and they shall call his name Emmanuel
God with us.

(Matthew 1:23)

Endnotes

¹ <http://jesuitinstitute.org/Pages/Liturgy/Advent.htm>

² http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

³ <https://www.sydneycatholic.org/casys/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/01-An-overview-of-the-Encyclical-FRATELLI-TUTTI-EN.pdf>

⁴ Advent wreath images from https://wikiclipart.com/advent-clip-art_24678/

⁵ Reflections adapted from *God's Word, Daily Reflection 2020*, St Paul's Publications, Australia

⁶ <http://www.stmatthewssnellville.org/location-worship-information/>