

## FRATELLI TUTTI ILLUMINATIONS FOR MISSION

**Willians Roque de BRITO**

On October 3, 2020, the eve of the memory of Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis surprised the world with his Encyclical Letter entitled *Fratelli Tutti - All Brothers*. In it he called Christians and every person of good will to commit themselves, with an open heart, to a common ideal for which to build bonds of fraternity and social friendship. In his words, Pope Francis reminded us *"how important it is to dream together! [...] Alone, one runs the risk of having mirages, seeing what does not exist; dreams are built together"* (*Fratelli Tutti*, n.8).

Universal brotherhood finds its root in the gospel and was therefore the desire of Jesus. In addition to the Gospel, it is illuminated in the lives of many saints, including Francis of Assisi. The saint taught his confreres to recognize all people as brothers and sisters. In addition, the Holy Father mentions several men and women who gave their lives for the common ideal of fraternity. In this vein, he also recalled Charles de Foucauld, of whom he says: *"His ideal of total surrender to God led him to an identification with the last, the most abandoned in the interior of the African desert. In that context, they raised their desire to feel every human being as a brother, and asked a friend: "Ask God that I be really the brother of all". Finally, he wanted to be "the universal brother". But only by identifying with the latter did he become the brother of all"* (*Fratelli Tutti*, n.287).

### **1. From collegiality to fraternity**

As the Church prepares and celebrates the Synod of 2023, Pope Francis has challenged her to move from clericalism to her baptismal vocation. This new ecclesial style is marked by the noun synodality. Thus, in less than a century, the Church passes from the *Roma locuta, causa finita* of the synodal attitude. From this new paradigm, all the baptized are invited to assume their specific part in the co-responsibility in the mission entrusted by the Lord. This spirit helps us to understand how to evangelize today's society through fraternal life.

At the Second Vatican Council, the resumption of the collegial style of the Church began, through which bishops became co-responsible with the pope in the task of governing, sanctifying and teaching the people. In this regard, *Christus Dominus* states: *"The Bishops, taking part in the solicitude for all the churches, exercise their ministry, received by the episcopal consecration, in union with the Supreme Pontiff and under his authority, with regard to the magisterium and pastoral government: all united in a college or body for the whole Church of God"* (*Christus Dominus*, n.3). With these and other definitions of the mission of the bishops, the Council triggered a profound transformation in the ministerial vision.

The same Council, however, recalled that the Church was missionary by nature and, consequently, all the baptized should strive to receive and live this mission. In this context, the first positive definition of the lay vocation emerges after many centuries: *"The holy people of God also share in*

*the prophetic function of Christ, spreading his living witness, especially through the life of faith and charity, offering to God the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of the lips that confess His name (cf. Heb 13:15)" (Lumen Gentium, n.12).*

From this co-responsibility drawn from the Council, which recalls that all the baptized are inspired by God, it gives birth to synodal spirituality. Currently, Pope Francis calls this paradigm by the noun synodality. From it, it is recognized that ordained and unordered ministers are ecclesial subjects and therefore responsible for their missionary activity. In this Church, everyone must and can hear the Holy Spirit through encounter, dialogue, communion and witness to life. For this very reason, synodality cannot be authentically lived without a disposition to communion.

If all are responsible for mission, all believers have the grace and duty to witness to the gospel with their lives to build a more just and fraternal society. This mutual responsibility must always be directed towards building a society where all, united under the aegis of God, make up the one human family. Synodality extends to the laity the role of collegiality among bishops. In the same way, fraternity extends to all people of good will the synodality existing in the Church. For, although open to all, fraternity is possible only through the united commitment of all people. Finally, the Pope recalls that fraternity is a concrete spirit that allows us to recognize in the other the face of the living God, especially the crucified and abandoned of the world.

According to Damian, Charles de Foucauld offers us a great light for the experience of this fraternal spirit, by which one can proclaim the gospel: *"You want to know what can be done for the natives: this is not the time to speak to them directly of our Lord; it would scare them away. We must trust them, become friends, give them small favours, give them good advice, unite in friendship with them, exhort them discreetly to follow the natural religion, prove to them that Christians love each other... Shouting the Gospel from the rooftops, not with words, but with life"* (CHARLES DE FOUCAULD apud. DAMIAN, p.104, 2007). It is understood, therefore, that fraternal living is a prophetic and evangelizing gesture, by which those who do not know the Lord can experience it in the goodness of his disciples: *"Thus let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:20). Charles de Foucauld testifies that the gospel can be welcomed much more by the example of life than by words and high theologies.

## **2. A fraternity without borders, without walls and with openness of heart**

Having understood that fraternity is only possible through a joint journey, it certainly concretizes and extends the synodal spirit to all people. Pope Francis says: *"I fervently hope that in this time that we must live, recognizing the dignity of every human person, we will be able to reborn, among all, a worldwide yearning for fraternity"* (Fratelli Tutti, n.8). In this way, the Pontiff makes explicit the desire for an evangelization that begins with the culture of encounter, not simply the

imposition of the dogmas of the faith. It is necessary to recognize that God created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, calling them to live as brothers (cf. Fratelli Tutti, n.5).

This opening, according to Pope Francis, should not be done along the lines of the current globalized economy. According to the pontiff, this economic model promotes, finances and appropriates local conflicts to impose a unique cultural model. *"This culture unifies the world, but divides people and nations"* (Fratelli Tutti, n.12), says the pope, with no respect for the various identities. This imposition of economic globalism generates conflicts and wars in many nations. In this context, politics weakens as it seeks the common good, making the strongest rule over the weakest. This model of economic globalization would not be effective to evangelize, but it loosens unity and provokes strife.

The Pope indicates that the world is experiencing a great decrease in historical awareness of the evils already experienced by humanity. Principles that caused the world wars, which left wounds and scars in humanity are getting erased. Only enlightened historical consciousness effectively collaborates to avoid evil and seek the collective dream of good, peace and fraternity. Despite the shadows, the missionary continues to sow, for *"God continues to sow seeds of good for humanity"* (Fratelli Tutti, n.54). The experience of the pandemic of the new coronavirus, which spread covid-19, reminded us that no one is saved alone and that salvation is a community poetry. Pessimism is not part of evangelization, because at its root, the gospel is joy and hope.

In Fratelli Tutti, the Pope recalls that there is a glimmer of goodness and solidarity and many people, even those who are not baptized. Because of them and Jesus, hope cannot be allowed to die. Under the wings of God, who cares about every person who welcomes him, the Christian is challenged to live and walk in hope, because he *"is bold, knows how to look beyond personal amenities, small securities and compensations that reduce the horizon, to open to the great ideals that make life more beautiful and worthy"* (Fratelli Tutti, n.55). Hope, therefore, is an invitation to overcome the barriers of self-protection and self-referentiality.

*"The proposal is to be present to those who need help, regardless of whether or not they are part of their own circle of belonging"* (Fratelli Tutti, n.81). In this sense, the mission needs to happen among the poorest and weakest in society. The true mission must be accomplished in the geographical and existential peripheries. Attending the peripheries will always be going beyond the border and, in this, the mission Ad Gentes is carried out. This action does not occur in a demagogic way, but occurs in the form of a physical presence, friend and sincere with all people, even with those who do not have the same faith and even with those who do not have faith.

### **3. Dialogue as a way of evangelizing and evangelizing oneself**

Before the 20th century, proclaiming the gospel meant imposing European faith and culture on non-European peoples, until they were completely transformed into members of the one true Church of Christ. This way of thinking was explicit in the Latin axiom *"Extra Ecclesiam nulla*

*Salus*", that is, "Outside the Church there is no salvation". It was firmly believed that any non-Catholic person would be doomed to hell, treating the Church as *Societas Perfecta* (Perfect Society).

It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that a process of developing a theology more suited to the evangelization of peoples began. It was the same Spirit who breathed his air into the heart of Charles de Foucauld in the African desert. The Second Vatican Council completely changed the landscape, beginning to understand that closeness and dialogue are powerful seeds of evangelization. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis is emphatic: *"To approach, to express oneself, to listen, to look at oneself, to know oneself, to strive to understand oneself, to seek points of contact: all this is summed up in the verb "to dialogue". To meet and help each other, we need to dialogue. It is not necessary to say what dialogue is for; it is enough to think what the world would be like without the patient dialogue of so many generous people who have kept families and communities together. Persevering and courageous dialogue does not make news like disagreements and conflicts; and yet, discreetly but much more than we can notice, it helps the world to live better"* (*Fratelli Tutti*, n.198).

*Fratelli Tutti* invites us to an evangelization that is accomplished much more by the power of witness and the luminous presence than by the influence of words. It was already possible to remove this intuition in Charles de Foucauld, when he affirms the importance of *"shouting the gospel above the rooftops, not with words, but with life"* (*Charles de Foucauld*). It is necessary to *"give oneself wholly to all to give them all to Jesus, rendering all possible services, affectionate in contacts, tender brother to all, in order to gradually lead souls to Jesus, practicing his meekness"* (*CHARLES DE FOUCAULD apud. DAMIAN, 2007, p.105*). Dialogue and witness are thus confirmed as the most authentic form of mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

From dialogue and openness of heart to the other, the Christian will be able to establish the culture of encounter proposed by the Pope in the encyclical on social friendship. *"Brother Charles is convinced that conversation brings people together, overcomes divisions, facilitates and enables friendship"* (*MIGUEL SAVIETO apud. AZEVEDO, 2022*)

Evangelizing in the style proposed by Francis means overcoming the globalism that imposes a dominant culture. *Fratelli Tutti* says that it is possible to sow the gospel by recognizing what is beautiful and true in local cultures. This attitude is not new, but it is an inheritance of Saint Justin, who through the *Semina Verbi* concept recognized the manifestation of Christ in every culture. The Pope recalls that the appreciation of the other generates a true friendship capable of understanding that, through goodness, the power of God acts in the Christian life and invites people to wonder in such a way that they may come to recognize and praise the Lord himself (cf. Matthew 5:20).

The construction of this friendship that evangelizes is the recognition that unity is superior to conflict and imposition (cf. Fratelli Tutti, n.244). Therefore, it is necessary to understand that sincere worship of God should not be the bearer of discrimination, hatred and violence. On the contrary, such realities only obscure the authentic vision of the good and beloved Lord Jesus, for *"he who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8)*, for he who loves God must also love his fellow man. *"Indeed, Almighty God does not need to be defended by anyone and does not want his name to be used to terrorise people" (Fratelli Tutti, n.285).*

#### **4. The image of the good samaritan: a stranger on the way**

Before beginning any reflection, one must take a personal look at this very provocative parable. Therefore:

A doctor of the Law stood up and, wanting to experience Jesus, asked, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read?" He replied, "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your understanding; and your neighbor as yourself!" Jesus said to him, "You answered correctly. Do this and you shall live". But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus retold: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They took everything from him, beat him and went away, leaving him almost dead. By chance, a priest was passing by that way. When he saw the man, he went ahead on the other side. The same happened to a Levite: he came to the place, saw the man and went on, on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was traveling, came near him, saw, and moved with compassion. He approached him and treated his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. Then he put him in his own animal and took him to a boarding house, where he took care of him. The next day, he took two denarii and gave them to the owner of the pension, recommending: 'Take care of him! When I return, I will pay what you have spent too much'. In your opinion - asked Jesus -, which of the three was the next of the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" "He who showed mercy to him". Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same thing". (Luke 10:25-37)

Pope Francis recalls from this passage the account of Cain and Abel. At that time, God's question resounded to his ears: *"where is your brother?"* To this question, Cain answered, *"Am I the keeper of my brother?" (Genesis 4:9)*. Here we see the indifference cultivated Cain, without realizing the evil of the fratricide he had committed.

It is not always the case that love of neighbour meant something superior to family or compatriots (cf. Leviticus 19:18), even though there were elements of openness in their bowels (cf. Sirach 18:13). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, a man of culture considered pagan to the Jews of **hierosolimitas**, made the experience of extrapolating the limits. He took the initiative, approaching the man who was wounded and abandoned. Ali revealed that to be close does not need to be compatriot, much less relative. Jesus presents the closeness that does not expect the initiative of others, but has the courage to first. In this context, Fratelli Tutti takes up an important intuition, already presented in *Evangelii Gaudium*: *"The 'outgoing' Church is the community of missionary disciples who 'first-come-first', who engage, who accompany, who bear fruit and celebrate. First*

*of all - blame the neologism -, take the initiative! The missionary community experiences that the Lord took the initiative, preceded in love (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), and for this reason she knows how to go ahead, she knows how to take the initiative without fear, to meet, to seek the distant and to reach the crossroads of paths to invite the excluded. She lives an inexhaustible desire to offer mercy, fruit of having experienced the infinite mercy of the Father and his diffuse force. Let us dare a little more in taking the initiative" (Evangelii Gaudium, n.24)*

Although the vital principle of fraternity was prevalent in early communities, Paul had to urge them not to forget it, inviting them to have mutual charity, extending it even to the Gentiles: in love *"there is no more distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbaric, quotes, slave, free, because now what counts is Christ, who is Tuto and is in everyone. Therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with feelings of compassion" (1 Thessalonians 3:11-12)*. This was the compassion experienced by the Samaritan. Pope Francis points out that he offered his time to the wounded. Perhaps he had plans to enjoy his day in other ways, but he devoted a moment of attention to those in need. (cf. Fratelli Tutti, n.63)

Through this parable, the Pope recalls that it is impossible to be Church and simultaneously to be indifferent to the pain of the poor, marginalized, exploited and forgotten. For if anyone claims to love God who does not see and hates his brother whom he can see, he is a liar (cf. 1 John 4:20). Indifference is perhaps the most subtle form of this hatred. *"We see how indifference is accommodated, cold and globalized, the daughter of a deep disappointment that hides behind this deceptive illusion: to consider that we can be omnipotent and forget that we are all in the same boat. This disillusionment, which leaves behind the great fraternal values, leads to a kind of cynicism. This is the temptation we have before us, if we go down this path of disappointment or disappointment. (...) Isolation and closure in ourselves or in our own interests will never be the way to give hope again and to bring about renewal, but it is closeness, the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture of confrontation, no; culture of encounter, yes" (Fratelli Tutti, n.30)*. Similarly, he quoted Saint John Chrysostom as saying, *"Do you want to honor the body of Christ? Do not allow yourself to be despised in your members, that is, the poor who have nothing to wear, nor do you honor them here in the temple in silk robes, while outside you leave them to the cold and naked" (Fratelli Tutti, n.74)*. It is, therefore, not only a matter of welcoming the poor for the poor, but of accepting Christ in his person.

In examining this text, Francis reminds us that *"the proposal is to make oneself present to those who need help, regardless of whether or not they belong to one's own circle" (Fratelli Tutti, n.81)*. In this sense the text helps us to understand that the Samaritan was the one who became close. The big question is to leave aside indifference, making us close to whoever it is. This closeness can happen in many environments: in everyday relationships, in a simple and affectionate smile, in dialogical participation in political debate, in popular organizations etc. Thus, one no longer

wonders if there is a close to whom to help, but seeks to approach those in need. According to Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "*the witness of an authentically Christian life, delivered into the hands of God, in a communion that nothing can interrupt, and dedicated to one's neighbour with boundless zeal, is the first means of evangelization*" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.41).

### **Concluding**

Fratelli Tutti teaches us that one cannot dream alone, that encounter, dialogue and openness of heart are necessary. Evangelization and the renewal of the world are not affected by the power of arguments or by the presentation of a perfect society that is built only by the presentation of an ideal. Only in the common dream of friendship and fraternity can justice be built, which results in peace. This is what the Brazilian missiologists have called the *Inter Gentes* mission - with the peoples. The evangelical witness of those who spend their lives for the good, for love of God and neighbour, is the most current way of shouting the gospel on the rooftops. Above the arguments is love, which is the bond that leads everything to perfection (cf. Colossians 3:14). Without it, every work would be inanimate.

Finally, as love is a law made so that each person can be ecstatic when he practices it, it can generate intimacy and ties so strong that processes of transformation originate, adding rich and timely experiences to being and acting ecclesial. Before the practice of love the gospel is announced, silently, but with full power, where even certain dogmas can be relativized. All this because the common ideal is superior to confrontation. To be close, friend, fraternal is the great work of evangelization capable of opening hearts in the twenty-first century. And this was already intuited by Brother Carlos since the beginning of the last century. An evangelization that springs from Christian witness is urgent, because "*the ear sees through the eye and the eye hears through the ear*" (*St Augustine*). Therefore, it is necessary to "*cry out the gospel with life*" (*Charles de Foucauld*), for the eyes can open any ear to the call of God.

### **A Prayer to the Creator (Pope Francis - Fratelli Tutti, n..287)**

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.



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