

“Brothers and sisters support each other in hardship”

In his 12 November general audience, Pope Leo XIV continued his catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, speaking about fraternity.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

To believe in the death and resurrection of Christ and to live paschal spirituality imbues life with

hope and encourages us to invest in goodness. In particular, it helps us to love and nurture *fraternity*, which is without doubt one of the great challenges for contemporary humanity, as Pope Francis saw clearly.

Fraternity stems from something deeply human. We are capable of forming relationships and, if we want, we are able to build authentic bonds between us. Without relationships, which support and enrich us from the very beginning of our life, we would not be able to survive, grow or learn. They are manifold, varied in form and depth. But it is certain that our humanity is best fulfilled when we exist and live together, when we succeed in experiencing authentic, not formal, bonds with the people around us. If we turn in on ourselves, we risk falling ill with loneliness, and even a narcissism that is concerned with

others only out of self-interest. The other is then reduced to someone from whom we can take, without ever being truly willing to give, to offer ourselves.

We are well aware that even today fraternity cannot be taken for granted; it is not immediate. Many conflicts, many wars all over the world, social tensions and feelings of hatred would seem to prove the opposite. However, fraternity is not a beautiful but impossible dream. It is not the desire of a deluded few. But to overcome the shadows that threaten it, we need to go to the source, and above all to draw light and strength from Him who alone frees us from the poison of enmity.

The word “fraternity” derives from a very ancient root, which means to care for, to have at heart, to support and sustain. Applied to every human person, it becomes an appeal, an

invitation. Often, we think that the role of a brother, a sister, refers to kinship, being related, being part of the same family. In truth, we know well how disagreement, division and sometimes hatred can devastate even relationships between relatives, not only between strangers.

This shows the need, more urgent today than ever, to reflect on the greeting with which Saint Francis of Assisi addressed everyone, regardless of their geographical, cultural, religious and doctrinal origins: *omnes fratres* was the inclusive way in which the saint placed all human beings on the same level, precisely because he recognized them in their common destiny of dignity, dialogue, welcome and salvation. Pope Francis reproposed this approach of the *Poverello* of Assisi, emphasizing its relevance after eight hundred years, in the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.

That “*tutti*,” everyone, which was the welcoming sign of a universal fraternity for Saint Francis, expresses an essential feature of Christianity, which ever since the beginning has been the proclamation of the Good News destined for the salvation of all, never in an exclusive or private form. This fraternity is based on Jesus’ commandment, which is new insofar as He accomplished it Himself, the superabundant fulfilment of the will of the Father: thanks to Him, who loved us and gave Himself for us, we can in turn love one another and give our lives for others, as children of the one Father and true brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Jesus loved us up to the very end, says the Gospel of John (cf. 13:1). As the passion draws near, the Master knows well that his historical time is coming to an end. He fears what is about to happen; He experiences the

most terrible torment and abandonment. His Resurrection, on the third day, is the beginning of a new history. And the disciples become fully brothers and sisters, after so much time of life spent together, not only when they live through the pain of the death of Jesus, but above all, when they recognize Him as the Risen One, receive the gift of the Spirit and become witnesses to Him.

Brothers and sisters support each other in hardship, they do not turn their back on those who are in need, and they weep and rejoice together in the active pursuit of unity, trust and mutual reliance. The dynamic is that which Jesus Himself gives to us: “Love one another as I have loved you” (cf. *Jn* 15:12). The fraternity given by Christ, who died and rose again, frees us from the negative logic of selfishness, division and arrogance, and restores to us our

original vocation, in the name of a love and a hope that are renewed every day. The Risen One has shown us the way to journey with Him, to feel and to be “brothers and sisters all.”

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