

# In new encyclical, pope calls for bridging coronavirus divisions

Pope Francis presented his vision for overcoming the world's growing divisions, laid bare by the coronavirus crisis, in his new encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.

In the letter, released Oct. 4, the pope urged people of good will to promote fraternity through dialogue, renewing society by putting love for others ahead of personal interests.

Throughout the encyclical, the pope emphasized the primacy of love, in both social and political contexts.

"*Fratelli tutti*," the text's opening phrase, means "All brothers" in Italian. The words are taken from the writings of St. Francis of Assisi, to whom the pope paid tribute at the beginning of the encyclical, describing him as the "saint of fraternal love."

The pope said he was struck that, when St. Francis met with the Egyptian Sultan Al-Kamil in 1219, he "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."

"Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God ... In this way, he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society," the pope wrote.

Pope Francis explained that his new encyclical brought together many of his previous reflections on human fraternity and social friendship, and also expanded on themes contained in the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, which he signed with Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

"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," he wrote.

"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."

The pope signed the encyclical in Assisi Oct. 3. He is thought to be the first pope to sign an encyclical outside of Rome for more than 200 years, since Pius VII issued the text *Il trionfo* in the Italian city of Cesena in 1814.

Pope Francis noted that, while he was writing the 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,” he said. “For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all.”

The pope divided his third encyclical, after the 2013 *Lumen fidei* and 2015 *Laudato si'*, into eight chapters.

In the opening chapter, he laid out the challenges facing humanity amid the coronavirus crisis, which has killed more than a million people worldwide. He cited wars, the “throwaway culture” that includes abortion and euthanasia, neglect of the elderly, discrimination against women, and slavery, among other threats. He also offered a critique of contemporary political debate, as well as online communication, which he said was often marred by “verbal violence.”

“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,” he wrote. “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.”

In the second chapter, Pope Francis reflected on the Parable of the Good Samaritan, presenting the Samaritan who helped a traveler who had been left for dead as a model of human fraternity, in contrast to others who simply passed by.

“We need to acknowledge that we are constantly tempted to ignore others, especially the weak,” he said. “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.”

He noted that devout men failed to help the traveler, saying: “Paradoxically, those who claim to be unbelievers can sometimes put God’s will into practice better than believers.”

He urged readers to follow the teaching of Jesus by not setting limits on who they regard as their neighbors. He added that he sometimes wondered why “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,” he wrote.

In chapter three, the pope stressed the importance of a fundamental attitude of love in the face of poverty and inequality.

He said that "the spiritual stature of a person's life is measured by love," but "some believers think that it consists in the imposition of their own ideologies upon everyone else, or in a violent defense of the truth, or in impressive demonstrations of strength."

He continued: "All of us, as believers, need to recognize that love takes first place: love must never be put at risk, and the greatest danger lies in failing to love."

The pope underlined that racism remained a threat, comparing it to a virus that "quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting." He also said that "hidden exiles," such as people with disabilities, should be encouraged to participate fully in society.

He argued that individualism "does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal." What is needed, he said, is a "universal love" that promotes the dignity of every human being.

This love should be applied also to migrants, the pope wrote, quoting the U.S. bishops' 2018 pastoral letter against racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts," which said there are fundamental rights that "precede any society because they flow from the dignity granted to each person as created by God."

In the fourth chapter, devoted to the theme of migration, the pope appealed to countries to "welcome, protect, promote, and integrate" newcomers. He urged governments to take a series of "indispensable steps" to help refugees. These included "increasing and simplifying the granting of visas," as well as "freedom of movement and the possibility of employment," and "supporting the reuniting of families."

But even these steps would prove insufficient, he said, if the international community failed to develop "a form of global governance with regard to movements of migration."

In the fifth chapter, the pope called for states to adopt policies that promoted the common good, critiquing both an "unhealthy" populism and an excessively individualistic liberalism. He said that populism could conceal a lack of concern for the vulnerable, while liberalism could be used to serve the economic interests of the powerful.

He also criticized the conviction that the market can resolve every problem, calling it the "dogma of neoliberal faith."

The pope lamented that the world had failed to seize the opportunity presented by the financial crisis of 2007-2008 to develop new ethical principles governing the economy. What followed instead was "greater individualism, less

integration and increased freedom for the truly powerful, who always find a way to escape unscathed.”

He urged reform both of the international financial system and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, saying it was vital for countries “to establish shared goals and to ensure the worldwide observance of certain essential norms.”

Setting out his proposal for renewal, Pope Francis said that leaders should focus on the long-term common good, imbuing their work with what he called “political love.”

“Recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian,” he insisted.

He also highlighted the “urgent need to combat all that threatens or violates fundamental human rights,” especially hunger and human trafficking, which he called a “source of shame for humanity.”

In the sixth chapter, the pope encouraged people to engage in authentic dialogue, which he said was not the same as arguments on social media, which were often “parallel monologues.”

He suggested that, in a pluralistic society, dialogue is the means by which society identifies those truths that must always be affirmed and respected. He quoted a line from the song “Samba da bênção,” by Brazilian artist Vinícius de Moraes: “Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter.”

It is also necessary to form a “covenant” between all members of society, rich and poor, which obliges everyone to give up some things for the common good.

“No one can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or her every desire, since that pretension would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights,” he wrote.

Above all, he said, we need to rediscover kindness.

In chapter seven, he discussed the conditions for peace and reconciliation, deploring the injustices of war and calling for an end to the use of the death penalty worldwide.

He noted that the Catechism of the Catholic Church recognizes the possibility of legitimate defense by military force. But he said this was often interpreted too broadly, arguing that “it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war.’”

An accompanying footnote said: “St. Augustine, who forged a concept of ‘just war’ that we no longer uphold in our own day, also said that ‘it is a higher

glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war.'”

The pope appealed to governments to give money allocated to weapons to “a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favor development in the most impoverished countries.”

He also emphasized that the death penalty today is “inadmissible,” recalling his 2018 change to the Catechism’s teaching on the topic.

In the eighth and final chapter, he highlighted the role of religious communities in building a more fraternal world, by rejecting violence and engaging in dialogue, as outlined in the “Document on Human Fraternity.”

In the encyclical’s conclusion, Pope Francis said that the text was inspired not only by St. Francis, but also by non-Catholics such as Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu and Mahatma Gandhi, as well as the French Catholic missionary Blessed Charles de Foucauld, who the pope is expected to canonize.

Francis ended the letter with both an ecumenical prayer and a “Prayer to the Creator,” which read: “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.”

**Tags:** Catholic News, Pope Francis, Encyclical, Catholic Church, Vatican news, Fratelli tutti