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Guide to Reading “*Fratelli Tutti*”

“Who is that man of medium build”, Jacob asked, “dressed in the elegance of this world?”. “Father, it is your son Joseph”, Judas answered. With pain and love he looked intently at the face of the Egyptian for a long time but did not recognize him. It so happened that Joseph’s eyes, due to that long gaze, filled with tears that ran down his cheeks; and when the pupil was dilated with weeping, behold, those were Rachel’s eyes,(cf. Gn 46, 47).

(Thomas Mann, *Giuseppe e i suoi fratelli*)

Words and gestures of fraternity

Pope Francis wrote the first word of his speech on fraternity on the evening of 13 March 2013, when choosing his name. The name Francis contains many messages together, but its message is above all a message of fraternity — *fratres*, brothers, friars. During these seven years of his pontificate, Francis has continued to write many more words on fraternity: in the Encyclicals, in the documents, in the catechesis, in the homilies and in the many dialogues. But he didn't write the most beautiful words with a pen; he expressed them through his gestures, mute incarnate words. Like the one on 27 March 2020 when, alone in the silence of St. Peter's Square, he gave us his most beautiful speech on fraternity.

It is not easy to write an Encyclical on fraternity. The first difficulty is inscribed in the word itself. Fraternity in fact refers to the relationship between *brothers* and, therefore, it is not a particularly suitable word to express a universal bond that includes male and female on the level of equal dignity; a difficulty that cannot be overcome even by starting the Encyclical with a quotation from Saint Francis in order to relate it ideally and explicitly to the *Poverello* of Assisi.

Semantic imperfection is one of the many weak aspects of fraternity. Also because, although the etymology refers to the relationship between brothers, we immediately notice that both its tone and the way it works reveal many traits proper to the talent of women. Starting with the family, were there no mother to ensure that each of the brothers and sisters receive a fair share, fraternity would not prevail at table or at play, but the law of the fittest. Along the roads that lead to our Jericho, to bend over and take care of the victims there are also, *and above all*, many, very many women. Women, who are the *magna pars* in retirement homes, in hospitals, at the bedside of untold nights of agony, have been there for millennia to take care of everyone. Under the Cross, in the greatest act of brotherhood/sisterhood, there were women, and it was women who went to anoint the body of the Lord on Holy Saturday, women continue to anoint the bodies on the holy Saturdays of life. Two sisters welcomed Jesus in Bethany, a widow hosted Elijah in her house and gave the prophet her last handful of flour and her very last drop of oil. Another woman poured perfumed oil over Jesus’ feet, an oil worth ten times more than the price of the treasurer's betrayal. He could not understand and still does not understand that waste, and continues to bemoan the fraternity’s inefficient use of the surplus funds. And it is not to be excluded that a woman wrote, or at least sang the

splendid Psalm on fraternity thousands of times. Perhaps one evening during Passover, as a mother looked at her children happily gathered round the table, that great Psalm: “Behold, how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one”! (Ps 133[132]:1) burst from her heart. Clare is the other name of Francis.

The second difficulty is found in the Bible. Abel, the first brother, is a brother killed by a brother. Jacob and Esau fight, and separate. Then from, Leah and Rachel, the rival sisters, Jephthah chased away by his half-brothers, Amnon's/O'nan's disgraceful behaviour towards Ta'mar, (Gen 38:9) to the regrettable words of the prodigal son's brother. This shows us that the blood relationship, however great and often marvellous it can be, is not sufficient to understand biblical humanism, the new people, the Covenant, that new and different universal brotherhood. Thus, to indicate its new brotherhood unrelated to blood, the Bible does not stop at praising natural brotherhood, but highlights its inadequacy. Besides, we know that we would not be brothers and sisters for life if, at a certain point that bond of blood and flesh, however great and beautiful, were not to become a spiritual bond, that we might be reborn in this spirit.

The biblical foundation

Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* has based his argument almost exclusively on the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke. A strong and important choice, which immediately shows that fraternity for Francis is *universal fraternity focussed on the victim*. Francis chooses to view the world beside the victims, whom he loves and judges from there, ever since the first journey he chose to make to Lampedusa. This was even at the cost of neglecting other basic dimensions of fraternity, such as *reciprocity*, which although a twin to — “love one another” — is (almost) absent from the text. The parable does not speak of blood brothers; it never mentions the word “fraternity” to indicate any relationship. The question the Scribe asked: “Who is my neighbour?” gave rise to one of the most beautiful *incipits* in the whole of literature: “A man ... went down from Jerusalem to Jericho ...”, (Lk 10:30). The gist of this story lies in the comparison between *proximity and closeness*: — which of the passers-by on that road — bent over the victim becoming his *neighbour*? Only that Samaritan, the least *close* to the victim, because he was not a Jew but a member of an excommunicated people, whereas the Levite and the priest, those in that world who were responsible for care and assistance, were much closer to him, yet they passed by. The one who took care of the half-dead man did not do it because he was his neighbour, but because he chose to become a neighbour. Brothers are born such, but one becomes a neighbour by choice. Francis writes:

“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 suffering of the man on the roadside. The distinction between Judean and Samaritan, priest and merchant, fade into insignificance. Now there were only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is wounded and those who pass by; those who bend over to help and those who look the other way and hurry past” (nn. 67, 70).

The next of kin, the brother and sister, in the Gospel were not the neighbour. In this case, neighbourliness was the essential dimension of this new and different fraternity. At this

decisive point in *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope happened to find an ally in the Nobel Prize winner for economics, Amartya Sen. Sen, an Indian, one of the most influential and original contemporary thinkers who is a layman and a representative of an oriental tradition (Hinduism), has proposed an interpretation of that parable very close Francis's. In Sen's view any concept of justice that claims to be just, that is, based on the fundamental principles of fairness and impartiality, needs the notion of proximity/neighbourliness to be totally free from geographical, ethnic, religious or community bonds. Sen writes:

Duty to others is not confined only to those who live next to us. The events actually established a link between the Samaritan and the wounded Israelite. In that situation, he experienced a new proximity. There are very few in our world who we could not consider to be close to us, (cf. A. Sen, L'idea di giustizia, Mondadori, Milano, 2010, p. 183).

On the same lines Francis builds the spiritual and ethical framework of *Fratelli Tutti*. A first important fact concerns the religious dimension:

“One detail about the passers-by stands 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”, (n. 74).

It is not enough to be a religious, to be brother/sister in the sense of the Gospel. The world is full of people who, after coming out of church, synagogue, mosque or temple, do not bend over the victims but pass on. We know nothing about that Samaritan except for his nationality, and we know even less about that victim (“a man ... went down ...”: a man, like Job, like every victim). This shows us that the concept of fraternity in the Gospel, and therefore of Francis, is truly universal fraternity.

In taking this parable as the foundation of fraternity, Francis points to a broad, inclusive, inter-cultural and inter-religious fraternity, the widest possible. And this is really very nice.

There are two particularly important features. The first one is very suggestive: “Robbers’ usually have secret allies in those who ‘pass by and look the other way’”, (n. 75). The second concerns an equally central challenge to Christianity; i.e. the risk we all too often run of being satisfied with the warmth of the community, avoiding the cold streets and suburbs:

“Authentic and mature love and true friendship can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others. As couples or friends, we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace others. Closed groups and self-absorbed couples that define themselves as “we” in opposition to others tend to be expressions of selfishness and mere self-preservation”, (n. 89).

Political and economic consequences

After recalling the relationship of the three key words of modern democracy: freedom, equality, and fraternity (cf. nn.103, 104,105) Francis directly addresses some of the main issues of the Social Teaching of the Church, of his pontificate and of today's economy. The first treats the relationship between private property and the universal destination of goods. The Church has always recalled, from the days of the early Church Fathers, that the

right to the private ownership of goods is *subordinate* to a more fundamental principle, namely that the goods we possess are a gift. This is a principle that has its roots in biblical humanism, where “the earth belongs to YAHWEH” and we are only tenants of the land that is always promised and given. In the course of Western history, private ownership has grown out of all proportion, to the point of being declared “sacred”, while the universal destination of goods has been progressively eclipsed by modern legal systems. It is therefore significant that in replacing the principle of fraternity at the centre, the Pope has juxtaposed the principle of the universal destination of goods to it, because, while private property is the principle hinge of individual freedom, the universal destination is the cornerstone of a humanism of fraternity:

“For my part, I would observe that ‘the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property’.⁹⁵ The principle of the common use of created goods is the ‘first principle of the whole ethical and social order’; ⁹⁶ it is a natural and inherent right that takes priority over others.⁹⁷ All other rights having to do with the goods necessary for the integral fulfilment of persons, including that of private property and any other type of property should — in the words of Saint Paul VI — ‘in no way hinder [this right], but, should actively facilitate its implementation’”,⁹⁸ (n. 120).

Linked to the re-establishment of the order and priority of the principles regulating assets is the discourse on *entrepreneurs*:

“Business activity is essentially ‘a noble vocation, directed at producing wealth and improving our world’.¹⁰¹ God encourages us to develop the talents he gave us, and he has made our universe one of immense potential. In God’s plan, each individual is called to promote his or her own development, ¹⁰² and this includes finding the best economic and technological means of multiplying goods and increasing wealth. Business abilities, which are a gift from God, should always be clearly directed to the development of others and to eliminating poverty, especially through the creation of diversified work opportunities”, (n. 123).

If the universal destination of goods has a basic, fundamental purpose, then also the goods produced by business, finance and that particular good called entrepreneurial *talent*, have a universal destination, subordinate only to the well-being of people/individuals. A concept contrary to that well-known metaphor of the “unseen hand”(Adam Smith), according to which the *entrepreneur*, motivated by private interests, neglects the common good and leaves it at the mercy of the objective mechanisms of the market. In the humanism of fraternity the unseen hand is inadequate; to this, which may even have a place, must be added a prior duty, the practical hand of whoever intentionally uses the goods and resources for the benefit of each and every person. It is the old precept of ‘put the common good first’ (the expression recurs 32 times in the Encyclical), expressed in new language.

It is easy to see a Franciscan echo in this outline of the primacy of the universal destination of goods. St. Francis was so convinced that he was not the owner of the goods he had to use to live on, that the only right he asked for: was to *nulla possedere*/possess nothing and live *sine proprio*. But the great Franciscan attempt to distinguish between the ownership of goods and their use failed. In 1322 Pope John XXII promulgated the Bull *Ad conditorem canonum* by which he established the impossibility of just *using* the goods, and attributed to

the Order the *ownership* of the goods it used. In fact, the concrete Franciscan utopia failed to prevail and influence the economy of the West. But it is not dead, as it continues to challenge our economies and our legal systems. Because, if today we are not able to invent a way to use the common goods/resources without being their masters and predators, we will only end up destroying the resources and the planet. And it is here that *Fratelli Tutti* meets *Laudato Si'*. Francis thinks that inter-human fraternity will not be enough if it does not become cosmic fraternity: “*related ... with brother sun, sister moon*” (LS, n. 92). Returning to the human *pietas* of the Samaritan does not mean forgetting that due to Creation and the earth.

From the idea of fraternity based on the ethics of the Samaritan further political and economic consequences arise, issues at the centre of the public debate, which touch on the life of the weakest people of the earth. Francis’ gaze, that sees above all the least, the most vulnerable, the poorest, imbues the whole Encyclical. He views the world from this perspective, he places himself next to Lazarus, at the rich man’s gate, “who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table” (Lk 16:20) and from there he observes and judges today’s world and time.

One consequence regards an issue very dear to Pope Francis: “Our response to the arrival of migrants can be summarized by four verbs: welcome, protect, promote and integrate”, (n. 129). Migrants are to be received and seen in the perspective of mutual exchange and benefit, not of alms (migrants have always brought and bring many advantages, the Pope recalls), but first they must be respected and welcomed in accord with the principle of spontaneous gratuitousness. Francis often moves on several levels at once, always indicating the moral order. He therefore specifies:

“Even so, I do not wish to limit this presentation to a kind of utilitarian approach. There is always the factor of “gratuitousness”: the ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves, without concern for personal gain or recompense. Gratuitousness makes it possible to welcome the stranger, even though this brings us no immediate benefit. Some countries, though, presume to accept only scientists and investors”, (n. 139). *“Life without fraternal gratuitousness becomes a form of frenetic commerce, in which we are constantly weighing up what we will get in return. God, on the other hand, gives freely, even to the point of helping those who are unfaithful, ‘for he makes his sun rise on the bad and on the good’ (Mt 5:45), (n.140).*

Another theme of Francis’s classic and new Encyclical is the distinction he draws between *people*, *populace* and *populism*. Here, Francis is very critical of leaders *who use* the common people to their own advantage instead of *being at the service* of the people. He uses some very harsh words, among the strongest and most incisive in the text, which are typical of his literary style:

“Lack of concern for the vulnerable can hide behind a populism that exploits them demagogically for its own purposes, or a liberalism that serves the economic interests of the powerful. In both cases, it becomes difficult to envisage an open world that makes room for everyone, including the most vulnerable, and shows respect for different cultures”, (n. 155).

Furthermore:

“In recent years, the words ‘populism’ and ‘populist’ have invaded the communications media and everyday conversation. As a result they have lost whatever value

they might have had, and have become another source of polarization in an already divided society. Efforts are made to classify entire peoples, groups, societies and governments as 'populist' or not. Nowadays it has become impossible for someone to express a view on any subject without being categorized one way or the other, either to be unfairly discredited or to be praised to the skies", (n. 156).

Francis is very hard on *populism* as he loves the *people* very much and wants to defend them from ideological manipulation:

"Closed populist groups distort the word 'people', since they are not talking about a true people. The concept of 'people' is in fact open-ended. A living and dynamic people, a people with a future, is one constantly open to a new synthesis through its ability to welcome differences", (n. 160).

Returning to the Good Samaritan, he then underlines a secondary and generally neglected aspect of the parable: *"Even the Good Samaritan, for example, needed to have a nearby inn that could provide the help that he was personally unable to offer", (n. 165).* In the parable, the alliance between the Samaritan and the innkeeper, a merchant, and the stipulation of a contract with two pieces of silver marked the beginning of trade relations in evangelical fraternity. An anonymous innkeeper boards the ark of fraternity with his two coins, and with him every businessman and financier who, by doing his job well and honestly, can offer to help and care for victims, and become a friend of the Samaritan and his neighbour. Working as an *entrepreneur* does not prevent that person from fulfilling his/her role as a human being.

In *Fratelli Tutti* there are some reflections on the market:

"The fragility of world systems in the face of the pandemic has demonstrated that not everything can be resolved by market freedom. It has also shown that, in addition to recovering a sound political life that is not subject to the dictates of finance, 'we must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need'", (n. 168, cf. n.142).

In fact, what the pandemic points out is that, wherever healthcare has been managed as an ordinary private good, the population and the States have suffered a lot, especially the poor. We are learning at a very high cost, that every human being is a common good, and that each person's health or illness can have such serious repercussions on the health of the general public that we cannot think of entrusting it principally to the market. If a poor person who falls ill does not receive proper treatment, his/her illness can become a *common threat*, which makes us immediately understand what the *common good* really means. There is an urgent need to rethink the relationship between the market, community, common goods and public goods.

"Never Again, War!"

This Encyclical also marks the end of the doctrine of a "just war". For years, we have been waiting for a clear, strong statement on this aspect of Christian doctrine that clashed too much with Francis and many of his Predecessors' words on peace. It has come at last: "It is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak

of the possibility of a 'just war'. 'Never again war!', (n. 258). And the note adds: "Saint Augustine [...], forged a concept of 'just war'" that we no longer uphold in our own day.²⁴²

On the death penalty too Francis could not express clearer and stronger words than these:

"Saint John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice."^(n. 246) There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that 'the death penalty is inadmissible',^(n. 247) and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide",^(n. 248), (n. 263).

If God prevented, with his seal, that Cain, the first brother and the first fratricide, be killed because he was a murderer, then "if anyone kills Cain" is a proper and distinctive mark of every civilization of fraternity. The Koran says this with even greater force. In the Bible the two brothers do not speak; instead the Koran puts words on Abel's lips. Perhaps looking his brother in the eye, Abel realizes that Cain is about to strike him and says: "Even if you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise my hand to kill you", (The Holy Koran, al-Ma'idah: Sura 5,28). Abel, the first non-violent man, is the one who dies rather than become a murderer. Fraternity is meek like Abel, and like the many meek people who have preferred to let themselves be killed in order not to become fratricidal, because, if the first murder was a fratricide, *every murder is a fratricide*.

The Encyclical concludes by acknowledging the *credits* Francis attributes to some great men (perhaps, the name of at least one woman would have been appropriate here):

"In these pages of reflection on universal fraternity, I felt inspired particularly by Saint Francis of Assisi, but also by others of our brothers and sisters who are not Catholics: Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi and many more. Yet, I would like to conclude by mentioning another person of deep faith who, drawing upon his intense experience of God, made a journey of transformation to the point of feeling a brother to all. I am speaking of Blessed Charles de Foucauld", (n. 286).

Every discourse on fraternity is in the plural, every fraternal song is a symphony.

Keepers/Custodians

Let us conclude with the Bible. Among the most beautiful biblical pages on fraternity, which tell us that the natural fraternity of blood can die and rise again as fraternity in the spirit, there are those Genesis devoted the cycle of Joseph. Joseph is not mentioned in the Bible as a patriarch, because Joseph is above all *the brother*, the one who taught us what biblical brotherhood means: "I am Joseph", he said to his brothers, "Is my father still in good health? [...] I am your brother Joseph, whom you once sold on the road to Egypt", (Gen 45:3-4). This is the culmination of the story of Joseph, sold by his older brothers when he was still a boy, who then became, as an adult, their salvation. Up to that meeting in Egypt and until he makes himself known to his brothers, Joseph was only the brother whom they envied because of his beautiful long-sleeved robe and for his dreams. He was a brother because he was the son of the same father. Now, he *becomes a brother once again* in a newfound fraternity, because he has forged a new bond in pain-love. The fraternity of "blood alone" has never saved anyone, on the contrary it has often been the cause of injustice, privileges,

discrimination, violence. Brothers and sisters only *remain* brothers and sisters for life if they also become friends, mothers, fathers, of each other. Brotherhood is like the dawn, it is “dew” (Ps 133[132]:3), but that sun does not retain half of its splendour at dawn if the blood does not become spirit, if we are not then reborn as new creatures in this spirit.

Through Joseph's tears, next to the word *brother* we can see the word *father*: “Is my father still in good health?”. Fraternity and paternity: in the entire cycle of Joseph, a great narrative on fraternity, father Jacob and mother Rachel are certainly not absent. They are a constant presence, essential co-protagonists in that story, though portrayed in the background to allow the metamorphosis of the siblings’ brotherhood. Biblical fraternity, unlike that of the French Revolution, is not fraternity without or against paternity. Fatherhood-motherhood recounts history and a common destiny, it is the root and bond (*fides*) that binds us to each other throughout time. In biblical fraternity, space (which becomes a place) is not the enemy of time because, together, they link past to future. Unlike the great Greek myths on paternity (denied to Oedipus, awaited by Telemachus), biblical paternity is at the service of fraternity, because it recalls the Covenant and is the pledge for the fulfilment of the promise. If the Bible had sought to place the lost and re-found brotherhood of Joseph and his brothers at the heart of the history of salvation, then the miracle of a fratricide that is transformed into new fraternity is possible, it is part of the human repertoire. And it can be repeated anywhere and every day, even today.

Finally, another great biblical image is that of the sentinel: “Son of man, I have adopted you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me” (Ez 3:17). Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel feel called to be sentinels. Isaiah (chap. 21) uses the word *shomer/keeper* to say sentinel. *Shomer* was the word Cain used when, not answering God's question, (“Where is your brother Abel?”), he asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”. He thus declared he was not Abel’s keeper (*shomer*). He had killed him *because* he was not a keeper (*cf.* Gen 4). Mutual guardianship is a name for fraternity/brotherhood. Wherever there is no sense of reciprocal guardianship, fratricide arrives sooner or later. In *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis repeats in many ways that, in human relationships there is no room for ethical indifference; that, if we do not choose fraternity we choose death.

The prophet, who is against Cain, guards Abel and enlarges the territory of fraternity to make it coincide with the entire city. And then, from that vantage point, he dutifully gazes beyond his city to survey the horizon of the fraternal land of all women and all men. A land he longs for, a land that calls. Pope Francis is a friend and brother of the biblical prophets, and with them he continues to watch over Abel, to try to save him, every day, from the action of Cain, his brother.