

**ADDRESS OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
“BREAKFAST WITH THE BISHOP”
HOW WE WALK AS NEIGHBORS IN A MODERN WORLD:
FRATELLI TUTTI APPLIED TO CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES
COLUMBUS, OHIO – SEPTEMBER 13, 2024**

Thank you, Bishop Fernandes. Thank you, Kelley and Angela, and to everyone on the Leadership Team and Board of Catholic Social Services. My thanks to all who have joined us this morning, and to all who are committed to this central work of the Gospel: helping people in need to live with dignity, hope, and purpose.

The witness of Catholic Social Services is like the witness that St. Francis of Assisi gave in his own day. Francis, who was called “*il povorello*”, “the little poor one”, preached and practiced love for all people, and indeed for all of God’s creatures. He preached love for others that did not depend on a person’s religion, “tribe”, or group. Love, for St. Francis, was based on our common humanity: he was convinced, like the Good Samaritan, that we are called to be a neighbor to each person in the human family. Saint Francis said that “only the man who approaches others, not to draw them into his own life, but to help them become ever more fully themselves, can truly be called a father.”¹ Francis lived out this truth in a very impressive way when, during the Crusades, he chose to travel to the Sultan in Egypt to offer respect, reconciliation, and a desire for peace. These words and actions of St. Francis are recounted by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. “The little poor one” of Assisi continues to inspire the Pope’s vision of a world in which people treat one another as brothers and sisters. In answer to critics who say that such a vision is naïve, the Holy Father responds: If we don’t spend all our efforts on fostering human fraternity, then what is the alternative? Considering the brutal wars and violence that are occurring right now with no clear end in sight, any approach that refuses to commit to dialogue and fraternity will only end in destruction.

By being here today, you are saying that you want to be part of the Church’s mission to foster peace and human fraternity. Catholic Social Services is very concrete in the way that it applies Gospel principles to the lives of people in your

¹ Eloi Leclerc, O.F.M., *Exil et tendresse*, Éd. Franciscaines, Paris, 1962, 205; as cited by Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* On Fraternity and Social Friendship, 3 October 2020, 4.

local community. By being involved with Catholic Social Services, you are able to live out the principle of universal fraternity at the local level. Love, mercy, and gift of self: these are a universal language that can be understood by anyone. This is the “language” that we are called to speak to all. This is what characterized the work of Mother Teresa, whose feast day was a week ago. She worked for the poor because Christ moved her to do it through the Holy Spirit living in her heart. But she did it for every person, no matter whether that person knew Christ or not. Part of what I want to give you this morning is a simple, encouraging reminder: This is what you do in your work for Catholic Social Services. You are sowing the seeds of human fraternity, so that God’s grace can make those seeds grow and flourish into the new kind of world that is being made ready for the eternal dwelling of God with his people. So, be encouraged, and be grateful for this work and this call.

Fraternity and social friendship are such simple concepts. And yet the Holy Father considered it necessary to write an encyclical on this theme, because we are living in a world in which war, violence, and acrimony seem almost to be the rule of the day. And so, as simple as human fraternity is, we need to remember how to live it. Since all of you, in some way or another, are engaged in this local Church’s work of charity, allow me to touch on a few themes that Pope Francis speaks of in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. You will recognize these principles as realities that you carry out each day in your work for Catholic Social Services. And if your involvement with the Church’s charitable work has been somewhat marginal, perhaps you will be inspired to get involved even more.

I will touch on four themes of the Pope’s teaching in *Fratelli Tutti*: 1) The Gift of Time; 2) Creating Community; 3) Rejecting the Society of Exclusion; and 4) “Rights without Borders”.

First, the Gift of Time.

In his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis observed that “Time is greater than space.”² This is something that makes us think a bit. But it’s true. So often, conflicts in our society – whether political conflicts within a country, or international conflicts – involve a battle over space. It may be the literal,

² Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 222-225.

geographical space over which wars are fought, or it may be the virtual “space” that gives one group the power to advance its agenda. But the Pope reminds us that time is more valuable than space.

As agents of the Gospel of Jesus, including the work you do in Catholic Social Services, the most valuable gift you give is the gift of your time. The poor are in need of many things: material resources, a place that they can call home. But as the Holy Father reminds us, taking the time to look a needy person in the eye, to stop and spend time with that person: that is often what matters most to the person. The Pope examines the parable of the Good Samaritan. Among the many things that the Samaritan does for the wounded traveler, it is striking how much time he gives him. It is this gift of our time that tells a person: You matter. You are important enough for me to spend my time being with you.

However, giving our time to another person does not only benefit the other person. To stop, to slow down, to spend time with a fellow human being: this is something that benefits us also. We are so easily drawn into the fast pace of today’s world. We are told that unless we fill every moment of time with the maximum number of tasks and activities, we are “wasting” time – wasting our lives. But more often, the opposite is true! When we slow down, perhaps putting away the phone, not looking at our watch, and focus on the one person who is with us: this is what regains for us a sense of what is truly valuable in life. Not only do we honor the dignity of the other person; we also become more human ourselves.

On behalf of the Holy Father, and on behalf of your Bishop: *Thank you* for your gift of time. When you give your time to people, you are telling them that, in God’s eyes, they are worth it.

Next: *Creating Community*.

So often, we think and speak of the poor in terms of “them” and “us”. This can be true even when we are doing the work of Catholic charity. Our mindset can be: *We* are the ones who serve, and *they* are the ones who are served. Two groups. But – and this is central to the Pope’s teaching – let’s dream of a life in which we are truly one with the poor, and they are one with us. A way of living in which we really are one people. A real community of love and of shared humanity. To live this way would be a fulfillment of the first conviction that the Holy Father had when he was

elected the successor of Peter: “How I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor!”³ In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis said: “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community.”⁴

Like the gift of time, creating community is also a gift. And like the gift of time, it is a gift not only for people to whom we reach out, but it is a gift for ourselves. When we are overly “selective” about the communities that we choose to be a part of, we often do not choose to include people who are poor. However, by making ourselves distant from the poor, we miss out on a deeper kind of richness. People who are used to experiencing poverty can teach us about the value of the “human touch” – about the simple, enriching act of *being with* another person, and of accepting that person as he or she is.

And so, I encourage you to create and expand community, including people whom you might have overlooked or excluded in the past. This is necessary for us to experience fraternity and social friendship.

The third of four points: *Rejecting the Society of Exclusion*.

This is an important principle for us who have lived our whole lives in highly developed societies. We are surrounded by a culture that teaches us: private property is an absolute right. The increase of wealth, material possessions, and resources for ourselves and our families can become our exclusive focus. But when we adopt this way of thinking, we forget a very important principle: the universal destination of created goods. What does this mean? It means that, considering that God has created the world and everything in it to provide for all human beings, the goods of the world belong to all people. Everyone has the right to what they need, not only to survive, but also to make a dignified life for themselves. And no one can justly be excluded from enjoying their share of the world’s goods.

And yet, we almost automatically exclude certain others from this right. In this country in particular, with our strong sense of individualism, we portray as heroes people who have become successful by their own strength and hard work. On the other hand, people who struggle with poverty are often blamed for their own ill

³ Pope Francis, Address to Representatives of the Communications Media, 16 March 2013.

⁴ *Fratelli Tutti*, 116.

fortune. But sometimes we don't take into account the many factors besides personal merit which contribute to inequality. The fact is that we all have a responsibility to help people to be included in a livelihood which God has intended for all people. Drawing on the teaching of Pope John Paul II, Pope Paul VI, and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pope Francis states in *Fratelli Tutti*:

“The principle of the common use of created goods is the ‘first principle of the whole ethical and social order’;⁵ it is a natural and inherent right that takes priority over others.⁶ All other rights having to do with the goods necessary for the integral fulfilment of persons, including that of private property or 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’.⁷ The right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right, derived from the principle of the universal destination of created goods.”⁸

Thank you, then, for every way in which you seek to share the goods of this world with people who have less access to those goods.

Finally, I want to touch on a theme of *Fratelli Tutti* which the Pope refers to as “*Rights without Borders*”.

When the topic of immigration remains the subject of political battles and extreme rhetoric, the migrants themselves are neglected. As disciples of Jesus and agents of his Gospel, we can't let this happen.

Just as time is greater than space, so too, “Realities are more important than ideas.”⁹ When you engage in direct service to people in need, as Catholic Social Services does, you understand this principle. As the Holy Father says in *Fratelli Tutti*: “Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people.”¹⁰ When you serve people, you are dealing in reality. In your social service work, you are confronting real people with real and present needs. Some of these people may

⁵ Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), 19: AAS 73 (1981), 626.

⁶ Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 172.

⁷ Saint Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967): AAS 59 (1967), 268.

⁸ *Fratelli Tutti*, 120.

⁹ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 231-233.

¹⁰ *Fratelli Tutti*, 115.

be displaced from their homeland for a variety of reasons. They are seeking what any of us seek: food, shelter, work, welcome, and belonging. The Gospel impels us to meet people's needs and to treat them according to the dignity which God has given them. The people we encounter are not numbers or statistics; they are children of God who are experiencing poverty and vulnerability. And we have the opportunity to provide what God wants for them: protection, sustenance, and hope. Pope Francis gives us four words to remember when it comes to migrants who are arriving in our country: Welcome. Protect. Promote. Integrate.¹¹ Questions about national sovereignty, borders, immigration laws... these are all valid questions. And Christians need to help answer these questions at the level of politics and national policy. But in the meantime, when we encounter people whose God-given rights, based on their inalienable dignity, are lacking, we need to do what we can to provide for them. Any nation's policies should begin from a place of respect for human dignity. As Christ's disciples, we are the people who should be living out that respect in whatever place we find ourselves.

Conclusion

The Good Samaritan. Saint Francis of Assisi. Saint Teresa of Calcutta. At every time in history there are those who show us what fraternity and social friendship look like. In our own day, and in each of our lives, there exist opportunities to become a neighbor to someone in need. But the gift of time, by creating community, and by fostering inclusion and the care for human dignity, may we allow Christ to live in us and through us.

¹¹ *Fratelli Tutti*, 129.