

Reflection for Sunday 26B, 26th September 2021

Climate change and COP 26 seem to be talking points across the world as it comes to terms with the different ongoing global crises and challenges in the different continents of the earth. There appears to be no let up in the many voices advocating and warning the world of the dangers and the harms that can be done to us if we don't start to be more responsible citizens across the globe. Whereas parts of Europe may look tired and weary, countries in the developing world are facing a completely different set of challenges to both the natural and supernatural world. How do we face up to the challenges of the created world? Equally, how do we appreciate that we are made in the image and likeness of God? Tough questions for challenging times. As world leaders, together with Pope Francis, are reminding us of how to care for mother earth and how do we deal with global warming, droughts, natural disasters, and pollution to name but a few. The answers as we have discovered are not as simple or as straightforward as many would have hoped they would be. The Church celebrates the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi on 4 October and brings the season of creation to a close. This year it has also presented unexpected challenges as the world emerges from the pandemic. They hope to bring many world leaders to COP26 in November to heighten our awareness and care for mother earth. The life and gift of faith have also to find their place in this and in many other conversations and dialogues. There is a new landscape of faith that we have to build up for the good of the Church and society. Let us hope and pray that this may be one of the fruits of the forthcoming COP26 summit as we draw this year's season of creation to a close. These words of Pope Francis from "Fratelli Tutti," may be our compass on this landscape of life.

"Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter". I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions. This means working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which "the whole is greater than the part" The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made.

The word "culture" points to something deeply embedded within a people, its most cherished convictions and its way of life. A people's "culture" is more than an abstract idea. It has to do with their desires, their interests and ultimately the way they live their lives. To speak of a "culture of encounter" means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life. The subject of this culture is the people, not simply one part of society that would pacify the rest with the help of professional and media resources. Social peace demands hard work, craftsmanship. It would be easier to keep freedoms and differences in check with cleverness and a few resources. But such a peace would be superficial and fragile, not the fruit of a culture of encounter that brings enduring stability. Integrating differences is a much more difficult and slow process, yet it is the guarantee of a genuine and lasting peace. That peace is not achieved by recourse only to those who are pure and untainted, since "even people who can be considered questionable on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked" Nor does it come from ignoring social demands or quelling disturbances, since it is not "a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority" What is important is to create processes of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences. Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them to fight the good fight of the culture of encounter!

Pope Francis, "**Fratelli Tutti**," paragraphs 215-217