

REJOICE in the LORD

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Strangers on the road

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A year ago, on October 4, 2020, Pope Francis published his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*). Shortly afterward, I provided a summary of the Holy Father's encyclical in this newsletter. In August of this year, I once again used this newsletter (Vol 2. No 24.) to reprint my summary and offer additional reflections on the teaching of Pope Francis—concentrating on the first chapter, “Dark Clouds Cover the World.”

This issue of *Rejoice in the Lord* is focused on the second chapter of *Fratelli Tutti*, “A Stranger on the Road.” Chapter Two of *Fratelli Tutti* shows how the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us to recognize the face of Jesus in all our brothers and sisters and to become neighbors to others, overcoming prejudices, personal interests, historic and cultural barriers. Pope Francis stresses that we all, in fact, are co-responsible in creating a society that is able to include, integrate and lift up those who have fallen or are suffering. Love is meant to build bridges, and the pope's statement that “we were made for love” calls us to be faithful to our identity as women and men made in the image and likeness of God.

In his reflections on the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Holy Father says, “this encounter of mercy between a Samaritan and a Jew is highly provocative; it leaves no room for ideological manipulation and challenges us to expand our frontiers. It gives a universal dimension to our call to love, one that transcends all prejudices, all historical and cultural barriers, all petty interests.” Love overcomes all differences of ideology, culture and “petty interests,” the pope says. But even more, love transcends differences based on authentic belief. The truth of our faith in Jesus Christ should never be weaponized, used as a “club” to assault those who do not share our beliefs. Instead, the love of Christ urges us to open our minds and hearts to all, including those with whom we disagree fundamentally.

In *Fratelli Tutti*'s second chapter, Pope Francis observes that we are all “strangers on the road” who face many obstacles on our life's journey. In fact, he says that each of us at various times in our life can identify with the parable's main figures: the man beaten by robbers and left for dead, the “righteous” ones who pass by without stopping, the stranger who goes out of the way to help, and even the inn keeper who accepts the wounded man trusting that the stranger will be true to his promise to pay whatever additional costs are required to care for him.

The call that each of us has received from our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is to transcend the alienation or strangeness we feel, regardless of our role in life, and to embrace the role of “neighbor.” A neighbor is someone who is close to us, who shares generously his or her home and possessions, who is warm, welcoming and hospitable. As the pope points out, we ordinarily think of neighbors as members of our own community, social class or ethnicity—people who think like us, act like us and believe what we believe. The parable of the Good Samaritan shatters this narrow concept of “neighbor” and challenges us to recognize every human person (and, in fact, all God’s creation) as our neighbors.

Pope Francis tells us that in the early Church, fellow Christians were to be welcomed, “even though they are strangers to you” (3 Jn 5). “In this context, the pope says, “we can better understand the significance of the parable of the Good Samaritan: love does not care if a brother or sister in need comes from one place or another. For love shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; in their place, it builds bridges. Love enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home... Love exudes compassion and dignity”.

Building bridges, not walls, is a consistent theme of Pope Francis. So is his conviction that “sins of indifference,” which the parable of the Good Samaritan soundly rebukes, can be more deadly than any pandemic. He notes that St. Paul recognized the temptation of the earliest Christian communities to form closed and isolated groups, and, so, urged his disciples to abound in love “for one another and for all” (1 Thess 3:12).

Isolation, indifference and self-centeredness are temptations we all face as individuals and as communities. Too often, we welcome the prejudices that keep us separate from those who are different from us, and we nurse ancient hatreds and wounds that keep us—like the Hatfields and the McCoys—at war with our enemies long after anyone can recall the original reasons for our enmity. “Sooner or later,” Pope Francis writes, “we will all encounter a person who is suffering. Today there are more and more of them. The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders.”

As the Holy Father observes:

It is remarkable how the various characters in the story change, once confronted by the painful sight of the poor man on the roadside. The distinctions between Judean and Samaritan, priest and merchant, fade into insignificance. Now there are only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by; those who bend down to help and those who look the other way and hurry off. Here, all our distinctions, labels and masks fall away: it is the moment of truth. Will we bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others? Will we bend down and help another to get up? This is today’s challenge, and we should not be afraid to face it. In moments of crisis, decisions become urgent. It could be said that, here and now, anyone who is neither a robber nor a passer-by is either injured himself or bearing an injured person on his shoulders.

Will we pass by? Or will we lend a helping hand? Will we be generous in sharing our time and money with those who need our help? Or will we shrug it off and “let someone else do it”?

We do not need to act like strangers on the road when, in fact, we are sisters and brothers to all. Let's cast off the labels, the ideologies, and the masks that divide us from each other. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders, Pope Francis says. Today, let's decide to be good neighbors who go out of our way to help the strangers we encounter along the way.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



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Synodal process looks to hear from voices on the margins of the church

By: Dennis Sadowski, Catholic News Service | September 23, 2021



Pope Francis is inviting Catholics both in the mainstream of church life and on the margins to voice their dreams, ideas and concerns in preparation for the Synod of Bishops in 2023. The process launches Oct. 17 in parishes and dioceses worldwide. The pope is scheduled to formally open the synod process at the Vatican Oct. 9-10.

Under the theme “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission,” the pope is calling the church to practice synodality, that is listening to — and hearing — one another in all facets of church life, two of the coordinators of the effort at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops told Catholic News Service.

The October opening “is just the first step in a larger, longer-term process of really incorporating the fruits of Vatican II and becoming a synodal church,” said Julia McStravog, a former USCCB employee who is a consultant to the bishops on the process.

“We’re going to have consultation. It’s also going to be a learning process about how to actually engage in a synodal way,” McStravog explained.

The launch begins a two-year process that culminates in the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. The synod is expected to adopt a final document that will guide the continuing development of a synodal church going into the future.

The pope’s call to synodality is rooted in his deep involvement as a cardinal in 2007 in drafting a document for CELAM, the acronym for the Spanish name of the Latin American bishops’ council,

which met in Aparecida, Brazil. The document issued repeated calls for a “continental mission,” a church that goes out in search of ways to proclaim the Gospel to all.

Starting in October, dioceses and parishes will be engaged in nearly six months of discussions, or consultations, in which people from across the church will be invited to participate, said Richard Coll, executive director of the bishops’ Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, who is coordinating the effort for the USCCB.

Each diocese is being asked to submit a summary of local discussions by April 1 to the USCCB, which will then take a month to synthesize in a final written presentation for the Vatican.

Coll said each diocese is being encouraged to let the Holy Spirit guide discussions.

“The Synod of Bishops is saying don’t focus on what the ultimate product is going to be. Focus on the process itself and how the Spirit will guide the church, represented in part through subsidiarity in the work that you are doing at the diocesan level,” Coll said.

The diocesan consultations also are an invitation to creativity, McStravog said.

“This is a moment to be co-creators with the Spirit. ... It is a chance for reinvigorating an engaged community through creativity and the call to be open. There’s a chance to reaffirm the good and reimagine some things that could be better,” she explained.

To facilitate the effort, the Synod of Bishops, under Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general, [introduced documents Sept. 7 to guide the process in dioceses](#). The USCCB followed up by quickly developing a supplemental document as well.

The primary document is a “vademecum,” or handbook, offering support for diocesan teams “to prepare and gather the people of God so that they can give voice to their experience in their local church.”

It also explains the objectives of the synodal process, principles of the process, the timeline for the two-year process, and resources for organizing the process.

A complementary preparatory document offers background to the development of the process, which is rooted in Pope Francis’ often-made invitation for “journeying together” in the world.

It states, “This journey, which follows in the wake of the church’s ‘renewal’ proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission.”

The USCCB document further defines the Vatican’s documents. It a checklist of actions, proposed timeline for dioceses to follow, and a listing of background materials to help walk parishes and dioceses through the initial process and ensure wide participation.

It stresses that during the churchwide synod that begins in October, and leads to the 2023 world Synod of Bishops, “the people of God are called to ‘journey together.’”

An addendum, developed by the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship, offers ideas for liturgical celebrations to mark the opening and closing of the synodal process in dioceses and suggestions for Scripture readings and musical themes.

Coll said the USCCB has been communicating with dioceses since May about forming teams to coordinate participation in the listening sessions. The Vatican documents were forwarded to dioceses soon after they were received by the USCCB.

At its meeting Sept. 14-15, the USCCB Administrative Committee, which includes the USCCB’s officers and the chairmen of the bishops’ various committees, reviewed the materials. It agreed to allot time for discussion on the synodal process during its fall general assembly in November, Coll said.

As dioceses prepare for the listening sessions, McStravog said the discussions present an opportunity for “gentleness and grace” to take hold within the church.

“This is a spiritual exercise,” she said. “It’s not just a bureaucratic or ecclesial exercise. It’s a spiritual exercise for the individual, for the parish, for the community, for the diocese and for the church in America at large.”

Coll and McStravog also echoed the pope’s Sept. 18 call to members of his diocese, the Diocese of Rome, to go to the margins to ensure that “the poor, the homeless, young people addicted to drugs, everyone that society rejects are part of the synod.”

“One of the questions is listening. How do we actually listen? It goes back to the invitation. The onus is on the diocese to really think through who is often excluded from our table. The church needs to go out and invite people back in,” McStravog said.

The vademecum also recognizes the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the church.

The document explains that the pandemic “has made existing inequalities explode” and shows that the entire human family is affected, requiring a unified response.

Secondly, the document continues, the pandemic poses logistical challenges for participation in diocesan listening sessions. It calls on dioceses to look for ways such as online gatherings, small group meetings or other safe means to gain insight from church members.

Once the Vatican receives the synthesized reports of diocesan meetings from bishops’ conferences around the world, the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops will draft by September 2022 the “instrumentum laboris,” or working document, to guide continental or regional ecclesial assemblies that will take place by March 2023.

Those assemblies will produce another set of documents that will help in the drafting of a second working document for the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. The synod is expected to produce a final document on synodality throughout the church.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to the question: Who is my neighbor? The word “neighbor”, in the society of Jesus’ time, usually meant those nearest us. It was felt that help should be given primarily to those of one’s own group and race. For some Jews of that time, Samaritans were looked down upon, considered impure. They were not among those to be helped. Jesus, himself a Jew, completely transforms this approach. He asks us not to decide who is close enough to be our neighbor, but rather that we ourselves become neighbors to all.



Jesus asks us to be present to those in need of help, regardless of whether or not they belong to our social group. In this case, the Samaritan became a neighbor to the wounded Judean. By approaching and making himself present, he crossed all cultural and historical barriers. Jesus concludes the parable by saying: “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37). In other words, he challenges us to put aside all differences and, in the face of suffering, to draw near to others with no questions asked. I should no longer say that I have neighbors to help, but that I must myself be a neighbor to others.

The parable, though, is troubling, for Jesus says that the wounded man was a Judean, while the one who stopped and helped him was a Samaritan. This detail is quite significant for our reflection on a love that includes everyone. The Samaritans lived in a region where pagan rites were practiced. For the Jews, this made them impure, detestable, dangerous. In fact, one ancient Jewish text referring to nations that were hated, speaks of Samaria as “not even a people” (Sir 50:25); it also refers to “the foolish people that live in Shechem” (50:26).

This explains why a Samaritan woman, when asked by Jesus for a drink, answered curtly: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jn 4:9). The most offensive charge that those who sought to discredit Jesus could bring was that he was “possessed” and “a Samaritan” (Jn8:48). So this encounter of mercy between a Samaritan and a Jew is highly provocative; it leaves no room for ideological manipulation and challenges us to expand our frontiers. It gives a universal dimension to our call to love, one that transcends all prejudices, all historical and cultural barriers, all petty interests.

A selection from Fratelli Tutti (Fraternity and Social Friendship), Chapter Two, “Strangers on the road,” Nos. 80-83, “Neighbors without borders.”

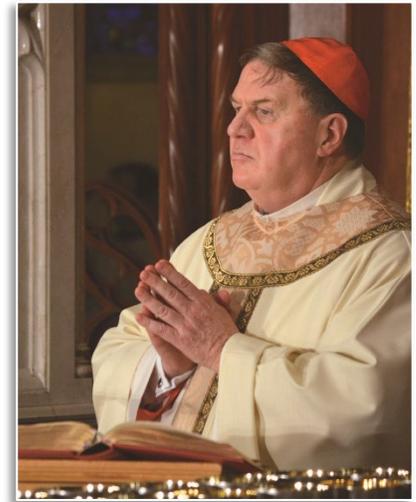
My Prayer for You

I would like to make my own this Ecumenical Christian Prayer offered by Pope Francis in Assisi at the tomb of St. Francis on October 3, 2020:

O God, Trinity of love,
from the profound communion of your divine life,
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.
Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus,
in his family of Nazareth,
and in the early Christian community.

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,
discovering Christ in each human being,
recognizing him crucified
in the sufferings of the abandoned
and forgotten of our world,
and risen in each brother or sister
who makes a new start.

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
so that we may discover anew
that all are important and all are necessary,
different faces of the one humanity
that God so loves. Amen.



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