



Pope Francis—World Peace Message 2021

‘A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace’

Article for a Parish Magazine

by Fr Rob Esdaile

Can you remember ‘BC’? No, not the ancient world, but ‘Before Covid’! It’s been ten months, but it can seem like ten years at times. ‘New normal’ is certainly not yet normal. Who ever thought that we’d all be putting on masks to go shopping, sanitising (rather than dipping our fingers in the holy water stoop) as we enter church, or viewing shaking hands (never mind a peck-on-the-cheek) as a high-risk activity? Was ‘working from home’ even a remote possibility last January? Being ‘Zoomed out’ was not yet an occupational hazard in the ‘office’ (as we liked to call the dressing table in the spare room).

A difficult journey - but a journey nonetheless

It’s been a difficult journey - particularly painful or poignant for some of us. Perhaps we can name names of departed friends, family or colleagues. Perhaps we have had other losses, too - of employment, income, travel plans or assumptions. Difficult, yes. But it has been a journey. We know now that we can do this lockdown thing if we have to. We have learnt other things, too - about the virus, about hygiene, about our extraordinary human capacity to adapt, about our next-door neighbours (Who was vulnerable? Who was on their own? Who needed a helping hand?). ‘Community spirit’ became the thing. We clapped the carers and put rainbows in our windows. We discovered the strength of our connections with people that we could no longer visit. We realised afresh that love does not count the miles ...

The learning wasn’t mere self-improvement and wasn’t an unalloyed good. (What a price some have paid!) Yet there is plenty to point to which might be classified as the emergence of a new dimension of ‘social friendship’ - the term Pope Francis used in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (*‘Brothers and Sisters All’*), published just last autumn. Of course, glib statements that we were ‘all in the same boat’ ignored the fact that, as on the ocean liners of old, some were dining in the state rooms and had access to the lifeboats, while others were



travelling ‘steerage’ with neither warmth nor safety equipment (PPE). Yet it swiftly became apparent that no one could deal with this crisis on their own (whether as individual citizens or as individual nations). Only herculean efforts at cooperation could save us.

Again, ‘clapping for carers’ may have been good for our morale, but it forced us to ask: who really keeps the nation going? We applauded a string of unsung professions: nurses, cleaners, care assistants, delivery drivers, supermarket staff, janitors, transport workers - people who are typically neither paid well nor recipients of public awards for their service.

What does Building Back Better mean?

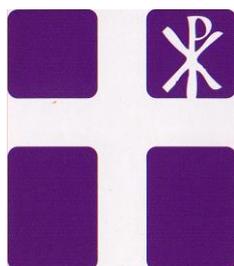
‘Build back better’ says the slogan (with its wonky grammar). But ‘better’ means attending to all, beginning with the most vulnerable. ‘Better’ means realising that we are indeed all brothers and sisters and acting accordingly. ‘Better’ means valuing the ones we used to overlook and rewarding their contribution. ‘Better’ means realising that our future flourishing depends on the ‘social capital’ we have - individuals’ gifts and stories and a shared desire to contribute to the Common Good. ‘Better’ means refusing to accept injustice as ‘just the way it is’ and refusing to accept conflict between the nations as ‘just the way it is’, too.

Pope Francis offers a beautiful reflection on the story of the Good Samaritan in *Fratelli Tutti*. What we learn there is, firstly, that our neighbour is the one whom we had thought of as our inferior and as our enemy, the despised ‘Samaritan’; and, secondly, that ‘neighbour’ is something you become by your actions, not your words.

Pax Christi - seeking together a world at peace

We’ve made a start towards ‘building back better’ with our response to the pandemic during this last ten months. In 2021, let’s continue that journey, working together to fashion a world in which all can belong and, while living in peace, can contribute their gifts, their care, their kindness. Nowhere is the call to join hands in friendship more needed than in building peaceful relations between nation states and overcoming the distrust that so damages relations between different countries.

If you want to be involved in that work of building ‘social friendship’ between the nations, especially in places that have known conflict, join *Pax Christi*, the international Catholic peace movement. It does such good work, fostering dialogue in places of conflict; empowering its members to act for peace and reconciliation; and providing resources, contacts, ideas and inspiration to help us all together to create a culture of peace. Contact them at St. Joseph’s, Watford Way, London, NW4 4TY or www.paxchristi.org.uk



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