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Pax Christi

# Peace Sunday

17 January 2021

‘A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace’

*Pope Francis—World Peace Message 2021*

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*The 54<sup>th</sup> World Day for Peace will be observed in England & Wales on 17 January 2021, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B). The readings for the Sunday Eucharist are: 1 Samuel 3.3-10, 19; Psalm Ps 40 (39).2, 4, 7-10; 1 Cor 6.13-15, 17-20; Jn 1.35-42. The suggested penitential act, scripture reflections and Prayers of the Faithful have been prepared by Fr Rob Esdaile.*

## Introduction to the Liturgy

The Bishops of England and Wales invite us to make today a day of prayer for world peace, using the theme proposed by Pope Francis: ‘A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace’. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly thrown up the question of the value we place on carers and the need to work together to support the vulnerable. Unless we put caring at the heart of our personal and community life, we certainly won’t be able to ‘build back better’. But ‘a culture of care’ means more than that - a rejection of carelessness, callousness and violence; and a recommitment to the path of peace and reconciliation.

To prepare ourselves to celebrate the great sacrament of Christ’s care for us, let us acknowledge our failures to care as we should for those entrusted to us and our failures to bring healing rather than hurt; peace rather than war.

Lord Jesus, you accept the rejected; you go in search of the lost.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Christ Jesus, you listen to our hearts, receiving our sorrows and our joys.

**Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you come to us today in the broken and the vulnerable.

**Lord, have mercy.**

# Introduction to the Readings

## First Reading (1 Samuel 3.3-10, 19)

When we read the story of the child Samuel in the temple at Shiloh we are always looking forward - to David, the king he will in turn anoint in his old age, and to Jesus, the Son of David. But we need also to look backwards, to the old priest, Eli, who provides the setting where Samuel can learn to listen to the voice of God. Without that care the child cannot grow and the call cannot be heard. What was true then remains true now.

## Second Reading (1 Cor 6.13-15, 17-20)

We easily mishear St Paul when he tells us: 'Use your body for the glory of God,' as though this were just about 'sins of the flesh'. When he speaks of 'the body' he means our whole 'embodied existence', our way of being in the world, our network of relationships. Are we building a culture of care, which enables others to flourish?

## Gospel (Jn 1.35-42)

Andrew and his companion, ask Jesus: '*Rabbi, where do you live?*' Where is Jesus to be encountered in our world today? Is it not precisely in those places where the questions of the human heart find an answer, where the lost discover that they are found, where people are enabled to feel at home and know that they are valued?

# Homily Notes - First Reflection

All you need to know about prayer and about the life of faith is there in our first reading today, in the two sentences that the child Samuel speaks: '*Here I am, since you called me,*' and '*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening*'. Okay, so that's a slight exaggeration; but to be a believer is to recognise that, like Samuel, you have been called by name. And to be a person of prayer is to make yourself available to that call. And to be a disciple is to learn how to listen and to wait on God's Word, clearing a space for meaning to form itself and for a direction of travel to announce itself. Faith creates a pathway for our lives.

So what is the Word that God offers us today (assuming that we are listening)? What is the meaning we must allow to emerge and then pursue unceasingly as a path to new life? In October 2020, Pope Francis published his encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti*. In part the letter is a response to the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. But it looks behind and beyond the pandemic, detecting a growing fragmentation in the international community. Globalisation, says the Pope, '*makes us neighbours but it has does not make us brothers and sisters*'.<sup>1</sup> The dominant economic model is one of '*limitless consumption ... and empty individualism*'.<sup>2</sup> In our '*throw-away world*', it is often people - the old, the vulnerable, the unborn - who get discarded. In a devastating critique of the contemporary tolerance of poverty, human rights abuses and the

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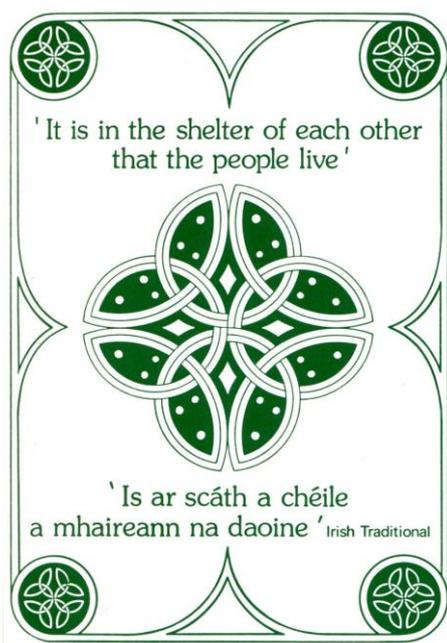
<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, On Fraternity And Social Friendship (2020) n.12

<sup>2</sup> *Fratelli Tutti* n.13

misuse of power, Pope Francis concludes starkly that these situations of violence ‘have become so common as to constitute a real “third world war” fought piecemeal’.<sup>3</sup> He warns us that ‘the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, replaced by a ‘cool, comfortable and globalised indifference’ that is rooted in disappointment.’<sup>4</sup>

So how to respond? Rather than hunkering down in our own little isolated bubbles, he challenges us to create a new ‘culture of encounter’ and to ‘rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters who orbit around us’.<sup>5</sup> And he sees in the acute crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic a call to ‘rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organisation of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence’.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, he sees grounds for hope in the heroic actions of so many ordinary people who sustain human community and have led the response to Covid-19 by their courageous acts of service (often in mundane occupations - supermarket workers as much as doctors; cleaners as much as nurses, bus-drivers as much as statisticians). As Pope Francis says, ‘They understood that no one is saved alone’.<sup>7</sup>



No one is saved alone! The way ahead, the way that opens paths of hope is what Francis calls ‘social friendship’. That means not reducing relationships to the level of the ‘merely private’. Friendships are the building blocks of a transformed society, with a capacity to reach out across every boundary or difference. In his message for the *World Day of Peace* (which we are invited to reflect on in England & Wales today), Pope Francis goes so far as to say that it is ‘a culture of care’ which is the path for peace.

The insight is so simple: that, since we are all children of God, we are all brothers and sisters; that, since we are all children of God, all have an inalienable dignity and an inalienable right to life and an inalienable right to a fair share in the abundance of God’s Creation; that, since we are all children of God, all have an equally undeniable duty to build a society worthy of that truth.

A culture of care is the opposite of so much that is accepted right now: carelessness (with the environment and with the way we speak on social media); indifference to the enormous sufferings of so many who live on the margins of society; isolation and neglect. A culture of care, rooted in recognition of the equal and inalienable dignity of all, makes the acceptance of exploitation and abuse unacceptable. But it also makes recourse to violence as a way to ‘resolve’ disputes unimaginable. Much as I may dislike the fact, my enemy is always my brother or my sister - and there is nothing I can do about that. That is the shocking lesson of the story of the Good Samaritan.

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<sup>3</sup> *Fratelli Tutti* n.25

<sup>4</sup> *Fratelli Tutti* n.30

<sup>5</sup> *Fratelli Tutti* n.32

<sup>6</sup> *Fratelli Tutti* n.34

<sup>7</sup> *Fratelli Tutti* n.55

*'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!'* Yes, the Lord does speak still, demanding that we build not walls but bridges; demanding that we stop wasting our time and resources on ways to kill people and dedicate ourselves and our energies, instead, to building trust between the nations and harmony within them. Will we dare to respond with the simplicity, openness and trust of Samuel? *'Here I am, since you called me!'*

## Homily Notes - Second Reflection

*'What do you want?'* *'Where do you live?'* *'Come and see!'* So begins the relationship of Andrew and the other disciple with the one who was to become their Master and Teacher, the one who was already their Messiah and Lord. So begins the life of faith in each of us. Yet the questions do not look like they are questions about faith at all. *'Where do you live?'* is the sort of thing any of us might say as an ice-breaker the first time we meet someone.

*'What do you want?'* is, by contrast, a question that life asks us: a question about the meaning of our existence, our aims and plans, our hopes and dreams. And, although there are plenty of voices constantly telling us what we *should* want (in order to be good consumers, good citizens and good company), *'What do you want?'* is a question which ultimately we have to answer for ourselves, if we wish to live as mature and responsible human beings.

What do we want post-Covid-19? Can we dream big? Can we hope large? Can we *'build back better?'* Christian faith says that the answer to our deepest desires (including the answer to our desires for our society) is to be found in Christ Jesus. The Word was made flesh; he dwelt among us (or, more literally, he *'set up his tent among us'* - Jn 1.14); and in that way the sacred became secular, the divine became human. That's what we celebrated (with all the limitations imposed by Covid-19) just a few weeks ago at Christmas. As a consequence, if (like the first disciples) we find ourselves asking Jesus: *'Where do you live?'* the answer is: *'With you!'* Wherever humanity is; especially wherever struggling, hurting, broken humanity is.

Ask yourself: *'What do I want?'* I guess your response will centre on those most basic things: food, shelter, warmth, security, a sense of belonging. What does anyone want? The assurance that they matter; that they are not alone; that they will not be abandoned; that they are respected for who they are and not for their utility or their achievements; that there is hope; freedom from anxiety and the freedom to live in peace.



Yet there are so many who lack hope, who have been robbed of self-respect, who live in isolation, who are overlooked and disregarded. Not only individuals but our culture and our planet all stand in need of healing. Pope Francis, on this *Peace Sunday*, asks us to affirm this truth: that *'a culture of care is the path to peace'*. In the face of what he famously called *'the*



## Prayers of the Faithful

**Priest:** As brothers and sisters, members of Christ's Body, the Church, let us pray for the needs of the Church and for the healing of the world:

1. For ourselves, that like the young Samuel we may learn to pray both, '*Here I am, since you called me,*' and '*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening*'. And that our lives may thus become a sign of God's love to all those we meet.  
Lord in your mercy: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**
2. Like the old priest, Eli, in our first reading, may the Church nurture in the young the recognition of their calling, a heart of faith and a prophetic spirit that desires to renew our culture.  
Lord in your mercy: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**
3. Let us pray for all who work to promote a culture of care in our midst: for those who nurse the sick, for those who support the marginalised, for those who feed the hungry, for those who oppose oppression and reject the way of violence. We ask God's blessing on the work of the international Catholic peace movement, *Pax Christi*.  
Lord in your mercy: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**
4. For peace between the nations, beginning with our own place in the world following Brexit. May we build bridges, not walls. May we build relationships of trust, rather than rivalries, working together to bring healing where there is hurt, peace where there is conflict.  
Lord in your mercy: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**
5. *Name a particular situation in the news at the moment where there is an absence of care and a path of peace needs to be found ....*  
Lord in your mercy: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**
6. Let us commend to God's mercy all who are sick (especially .....)  
that they might be restored to health; and all who have died  
(especially.....). May they be gathered, with people of every  
race and language and way of life, into the joy of God's Kingdom.  
Lord in your mercy: **HEAR OUR PRAYER.**
7. In silence, let us place before the Lord all that is in our hearts ...

**Final Prayer:** Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Give us hearts that hear the cry of the poor, the pain of our planet and our own calling to build a culture of care. To you we make all these our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**