

## CATHOLIC MEN'S DUTY TO THE POOR IN THE LIGHT OF FRATELLI TUTTI.

**1. Greetings and gratitude:** My dear Catholic Men and members of **Unum Omnes**, my dear friends in Christ Jesus, it is a joy to be able to log onto this webinar and to share with you on the topic: “**Catholic Men’s duty to the poor in the light of Fratelli Tutti**”. Thanks to this invitation, I have had to read immediately the entire **Encyclical Letter** of 194 pages of the Holy Father Pope Francis **on Fraternity and Social Friendship**, which was published on October 03, 2020, Vigil of the Feast of St. Francis at Assisi in Italy.

I recommend it highly to you, my dear friends. It is a must-read! Take my word for it: it is very simple to read and you will enjoy it and be enriched by it. You can download it or better still, buy a copy which you can read, and re-read and even underline or highlight the teachings of the Pope that strike you as very relevant and pertinent to our times, like I have done. **See!**

Permit me to say that, we Catholics have every reason to be proud of the Popes of our times. Through their sermons and teachings under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to re-read the Holy Scriptures and to contextualize the good news of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to know our mission and to act on them accordingly.

(By the way, today, November 18, is the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome, Italy. Let us pray for the Holy Father, Pope Francis, the Vicar of Christ on earth in his onerous responsibility of confirming us in the faith!)

**2. Our topic is: Catholic Men’s duty to the poor in the light of “Fratelli tutti”.**

As Catholic Men and members of the UNUM OMNES, I believe you know your main objective is “***to promote the presence, participation and co-responsibility of Catholic men in society and the Church, in order to enable them fulfill their mission of evangelization... and work for human development, including working for the advancement of human rights beginning with the fundamental right to life, increasing educational opportunities, providing***

***means of subsistence for the poor, marginalized and victims of violence and helping to train those who are without resources or opportunities to fend for themselves”*** (taken from **General Information re Unum Omnes**).

Our task for today is to try to understand this duty to the poor in the light of ***Fratelli Tutti***, Pope Francis’ ***Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship***. Let me say that if you take seriously the General Information which I just quoted, and you try to live by it as Catholic Men in the Unum Omnes, you will be fulfilling the deepest wishes of our Holy Father in his Encyclical Letter on ***Fraternity and Social Friendship***. I will go on to recommend that you make this and other Social Teachings of the Popes your main study documents and directives.

Let me immediately say that in this Encyclical Letter, Pope Francis is not saying anything new. He is simply teaching the very things our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ taught in the Gospels; but what is new and poignant is how Pope Francis, with deep perspicacity, analyzes the Gospel message of the ***Parable of the Good Samaritan***, and how he contextualizes it for you and me to see and know who are the poor in our society today, and what is expected of each one of us, the ***new disciples and apostles*** of Christ in fulfillment of our evangelization mission in our world of today.

**2.1: Who are the poor according to the Holy Scriptures and in the light of Fratelli tutti?** The designation ***the poor*** in the Holy Bible calls immediately to mind what I have dubbed ***the manifesto of Our Lord Jesus Christ*** at the start of his evangelization mission as ***St. Luke puts it in Chapter 4:16-21***. I read it from the African Bible version.

Please permit me to repeat the passage that is most relevant to our study, namely Lk. 4:18-19:

***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord”.***

At the end, St. Luke reports that all eyes in the synagogue were set intently on Jesus, and he said to them: ***“Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing!”***

From the above passage, Jesus Christ makes it clear that his mission was ***“to bring glad tidings (or good news) to the poor”***. And the poor in this context, taken literally are ***“the captives... the blind... and the oppressed”***. When understood in the context of the work of salvation that Christ came to bring in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit, the poor are made up of those who are ***captives*** of all kinds, physical, psychological, spiritual, political, ideological, etc.; ***blind peoples*** of all types of blindness, and ***those suffering oppressions*** of all sorts. It is for all of these persons and the societies they live in that Jesus in St. John’s Gospel 10:10 says: ***“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly! (In some other texts: “...that they may have life and have it to the full!”)***. So the poor are all those who need the fullness of life, here and in the hereafter, namely salvation.

Another emblematic passage of the poor in the Gospels is Mt. 5:3-12, namely ***the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes!*** Let me dwell on the opening verse which says: ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...”*** Further in this sermon, Jesus Christ defines those who are ***the poor in spirit***, namely as ***“...those who mourn... the meek... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... the merciful... the pure in heart... the peacemakers... those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness... those persecuted falsely and insulted and maligned...”***

It is to these “poor” that Jesus Christ came to ***proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord***. They shall be saved. The promises shall surely be fulfilled for them through his mission of evangelization and atoning passion and death on the cross.

So my dear friends, for you and me, today’s ***disciples of Jesus Christ and apostles*** whom Jesus Christ sends on his evangelization mission, saying ***“Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age”***, our mission is until the end of the age, and we are to make disciples, converts of all nations.

2.2: In his Encyclical Letter **Fratelli tutti**, our Holy Father opens our eyes through **the Parable of the Good Samaritan** to a deeper dimension of human life and development, and to the truth and fact that we are all poor; so, we must see ourselves in the poor traveller who was attacked by robbers, wounded and stripped of all, his dignity and possessions, and left by the wayside to die. Similarly, we are all called to be “neighbour” to one another, especially to the poor and deprived in our societies and in our world today everywhere. Everybody is our brother and sister and neighbor. But they are more our neighbours, those that society has stripped of their inalienable dignity and God-given rights (see *Fratelli Tutti* 79).

2.3: In the eyes of the Holy Father, poverty is not solely because one lacks material goods and well-being, but also there are many who are poor in the eyes of God because, like **the rich fool** in the Gospel of St. Luke 12:13-21, they are only rich in material and worldly possessions. They often lack spiritual riches, such as love of neighbor, humility, compassion, purity of heart, hunger and thirst for righteousness, justice and truth and mercy, the spirit of service to their neighbor and to society and humanity as a whole.

This is what Pope Francis says in *Fratelli tutti* 22: ***“When the dignity of the human person is respected and his or her rights recognized and guaranteed, creativity of the human personality is released through actions that further the common good. Yet, by closely observing our contemporary societies, we see numerous contradictions that lead us to wonder whether the equal dignity of all human beings, solemnly proclaimed seventy years ago, is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every situation. In today’s world, many forms of injustice persist, fed by reductive anthropological visions and by a profit-based economic model that does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings. While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violated. What does this tell us about the equality of rights grounded in innate human dignity?”***

Besides, Pope Francis calls our attention to poverty created by structures of injustice and oppression, making some of the children of God live in different forms of captivity and deprivation and oppression. All these poor people are those for whom the Spirit anointed Jesus Christ and sent to

**bring good news.** And this is the evangelization mission that Christ Jesus has entrusted to you and me, those baptized into his life.

As Catholic Men, you are sent in whatever state or vocation, career or profession or job, to continue this mission and to ensure that we work for, and **“proclaim the year acceptable to the Lord”**. We are all sent by Christ Jesus to work for the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah.

2.4: In the Encyclical Letter, the Holy Father develops what he terms **Fraternity and Social Friendship**, inspired, *inter alia*, by his encounter and interaction with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi in February 2019 which led to the signing of the **“Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”**(FT 5).

Pope Francis invites believers of all religions to be actors on the cultural, social, political and economic spheres of human life and existence. He identifies as poor of today, the under-privileged, refugees, displaced persons and immigrants, and especially those compelled to flee from their God-given countries to look for a home and livelihood elsewhere (see FT 129; 130).

For them all, especially women and children, the Pope makes it clear that we are to work in the socio-political sphere for a **“form of global governance”** for more permanent solutions, and not just one of emergency responses, to unjust man-made situations (see FT 132). **“Immigrants, if they are helped to integrate, are a blessing, a source of enrichment and new gift that encourages a society to grow”** (FT 135).

In paragraph 137, for instance, Pope Francis writes: **“We need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet...In the end, this will impoverish us all.”**

At the beginning of his Encyclical Letter, Pope Francis acknowledged the COVID-19 pandemic as one such lesson for humanity to learn that we are inextricably inter-dependent and, consequently, co-responsible for each other’s wellbeing here on earth. We all must work for the common good

and welfare of all. This is a task for Catholic Men also in addition to our duty to fight poverty and for the betterment of life of the poor and downtrodden, etc.

Pope Francis says that: “**...by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Brotherhood between all men and women...**” (FT 8).

Again, in No. 118 the Encyclical teaches us this: “***The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of colour, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development***”.

Calling for the indispensable need for **universal fraternity and social friendship**, the Holy Father urges us to understand the need too for “**a universal love that promotes persons**”, as well as “**rights without borders**” and rights, not only of the individual person, but also of peoples and entire nations. He exhorts believers to develop “**a heart open to the whole world**” (see Chapter 4).

In Chapter 5, for instance, Pope Francis outlines “**a better kind of politics**”, and reflects on “**Social and Political Charity**”, and the “**Exercise of Political Love**”. No. 181 teaches that: “**...charity finds expression not only in close and intimate relationships but also in macro-relationships: social, economic and political**”.

No. 186 says concerning political love or charity: “**It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering. If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity. While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other**

***person, and thus he practices a lofty form of charity that ennobled his or her political activity”.***

In Chapter 6, Pope Francis develops ***Social Dialogue*** necessary for a new ***culture of encounter***, he proposes paths for a renewed encounter among individuals, among men and women, and among nations and societies.

Finally, he emphasizes ***the role of religion in this new civilization of love and culture of life*** in the last chapter, presenting religion as God’s call to the service of fraternity and social friendship, since religion undeniably believes in One God, Father and Creator of all human beings. And, therefore, religion fosters the brotherhood of all humanity.

3. At this juncture, let me conclude my teaching to allow some reflection, sharing and even questions, if any. As Catholic Men, in accordance with your objectives, you are all called to ***a preferential love and option for the poor*** like Jesus Christ in Lk. 4:18-19. Furthermore, like the Good Samaritan, Pope Francis teaches that you are also called to identify with the poor man who fell among the robbers and was stripped of all dignity. And, therefore, you are also in need of salvation. Furthermore, you owe it to Christ Jesus our Saviour, to be the Good Samaritan in the lives of all those who are poor, marginalized, deprived and oppressed in and by society and the political institutions.

We should not forget that being a disciple and an apostle of Christ Jesus, in our evangelization mission, the Catholic Men in Unum Omnes are called to be ***the salt and light of the world*** in all our responsibilities, be they social, political and cultural. Furthermore, ***“let your light so shine in the sight of men, that seeing your good works, they may glorify your Father who is in heaven”*** (Mt. 5:13-16).

In the end, we cannot forget that Jesus Christ says: ***“Whatsoever you do the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me!”*** (Mt. 25:31ff). The ultimate is to see Christ Jesus in our brothers and sisters always, and to serve Him alone. Thanks.

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