

A HEALTHY OPENNESS

Let us realize that as our minds and hearts narrow, the less capable we become of understanding the world around us. Without encountering and relating to differences, it is hard to achieve a clear and complete understanding even of ourselves and of our native land. Other cultures are not “enemies” from which we need to protect ourselves, but differing reflections of the inexhaustible richness of human life. Seeing ourselves from the perspective of another, of one who is different, we can better recognize our own unique features and those of our culture: its richness, its possibilities and its limitations. Our local experience needs to develop “in contrast to” and “in harmony with” the experiences of others living in diverse cultural contexts. *(Pope Francis: “Fratelli Tutti” para 147)*

For a healthy relationship between love of one’s native land and a sound sense of belonging to our larger human family, it is helpful to keep in mind that global society is not the sum total of different countries, but rather the communion that exists among them. The mutual sense of belonging is prior to the emergence of individual groups. Each particular group becomes part of the fabric of universal communion and there discovers its own beauty. All individuals, whatever their origin, know that they are part of the greater human family, without which they will not be able to understand themselves fully. *(Pope Francis: “Fratelli Tutti” para 149)*

To see things in this way brings the joyful realization that no one people, culture or individual can achieve everything on its own: to attain fulfilment in life we need others. An awareness of our own limitations and incompleteness, far from being a threat, becomes the key to envisaging and pursuing a common project. For “man is a limited being who is himself limitless”. *(Pope Francis: “Fratelli Tutti” para 150)*

In this section the Holy Father is primarily talking about relationships between the local and the global community and indeed about relationships between nations. Underpinning all that he says is the application of the same principles between individuals and local communities – families, neighbourhoods, cities/towns, rural/city. An important element here is to ensure that, without compromise of our own deep values, we remain genuinely open to clearly hearing what others are communicating. He advocates a helpful stance of “seeing ourselves from the perspective of another” as part of that methodology. It enhances our sense of community and, he reminds us, both are poorer without the other. It is God who is the source of our being and that means all of us are united in God.

Of course this has application in every moment of our lives as disciples of Jesus. But perhaps it has a particular relevance in our current circumstances. We have been restricted in many ways by the efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic – this has meant an addition layer of ‘isolation’ from each other – and that is difficult enough. AND we have embarked upon the journey of the Plenary Council which, at its very heart, demands we continue to discern, share, and consider many differing thoughts, views, understandings, opinions and aspirations and allow ourselves to have that ‘healthy openness’ which will admit the grace of inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Hard as that might be at times, the Holy Father teaches us, this is essential if we are to be truly inspired by the Holy Spirit the source of Divine Wisdom in our understanding and of fidelity in our discipleship.

Reflection.

1. In this land, increasingly, we are being exposed to those of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. How prepared am I to genuinely consider those difference without a prejudicial dismissal?
2. In what way(s) can I share the blessings of my own history so that they may become a source of inspiration and welcome to others?

3. How does the knowledge of the history of others help me to better appreciate my sense of being part of the communion of beings created by and endowed with gifts by God?

Prayer from the Encyclical

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.