

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
Brothers and Sister All

Deacon Mark Kelly

Pope Francis this month issued his third encyclical (letter addressed to Catholics and people of good will all over the world). Entitled “Fratelli Tutti” or “Brothers and Sisters All”, the Pope’s letter echoes the themes of this week’s gospel (Matt 22:34-40). The greatest commandment, Jesus tells us (Matt 22:37-39), is to love God and our neighbour absolutely. He leaves us to enact the commandment, to love God and neighbour in the practical reality of our lives. In every situation we face, his commandment is not about protecting systems and ideologies but responding to this simple call to love.

Elsewhere, Jesus elaborates (Luke 10:25-37) with the “Good Samaritan” parable which is at the heart of Pope Francis’ new letter. The Pope calls Jesus’ Good Samaritan story “the criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project (FT 69, 72). We are moved to respond to our sister or brother in need, whoever they are, wherever they may come from – [turning] outwards, to act as neighbours, and to reach out to all those in need.”

Like Jesus, Pope Francis doesn’t hesitate to call out evil and error in the world. Fratelli Tutti challenges “individualism” which doesn’t make us freer or more equal brothers and sisters. He urges preservation of our planet, calling out those following a meaningless and short-sighted strategy of sowing fear and distrust in the face of external threats. He challenges the nonsense idea of “trickle-down economics” which assumes the poor will benefit by policies preferencing the rich. And he identifies the scandalous suffering, death and wastage of food as a consequence of world food markets.

“Hunger”, pronounces Pope Francis, “is criminal! Food is an inalienable right.” And health care as well. He decries a system in which health policy is subject to the dictates of finances. Human dignity and alternative social structures need to be paramount.