

A prophetic message for our time

I imagine that every person in Mary Ward's ever extending 'circle of friends' knows that our global systems are not working well. Everything we hoped for at the turn of the millennium is increasingly fragile: peace, care for the poor, employment, health, the very earth on which we depend.

Pope Francis' newest encyclical, which he wrote encouraged by Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, gathers together threads of the social justice message he has been announcing throughout his time as Pope. He challenges us to recognize the injustice of systems which support selfishness, greed, and exploitation of those who are "other", a global homogenizing of cultures for the purpose of profit. A world-wide rethink of political, social and economic priorities is a tall order. The solution does not lie only with the powerful, but has to rise from a grass roots commitment to care, to reach out, to choose to be open to other faiths, other cultures, other nationalities, especially when, exhausted, they arrive on our nation's doorstep, begging for a new life after their experience of devastation and terror. We are one family: will we turn them away?

Do we dare respond? Are we the Levite or the person from Samaria?

A new style of leadership? An openness to ways and cultures which are different? These resonate with the steps IBVM/CJ are making towards union, as well as our desire to reach out across boundaries. One first step is to encourage each other to read this admittedly long encyclical, and grapple with his ideas, to pray over them, allowing them to transform us so we can build a new culture. His view of our current situation is relentlessly honest, but also manages to instill hope that such a radical turn-around is possible. Many will have to take a flying leap over the first two words to reach the core of his message, but if change is to happen it will only happen when we integrate the heart of what Pope Francis is calling for and share it strongly with our own families, colleagues and friends. We can carry this prophetic word into our small worlds. Let us encourage each other, as 'sorelle' and 'fratelli', to read it - to go beyond the title, which, for many, fails to carry the message of inclusion so strongly argued in the body of the text.

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