

CHRISM MASS / October 8, 2020

Isaiah 61:1-3 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. **Isaiah 61:6** but you shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God; **Isaiah 61:8-9** I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

Revelation 1:4-8 ⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. ⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Luke 4:16-21 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests, and all of the People of God of the Diocese of Saskatoon:

A lot has happened since we gathered to celebrate our last Chrism Mass. In the Spring of 2019 – life continued more or less as usual. We gathered to celebrate yet another Chrism Mass together as we began Holy Week, - a day when clergy join with their bishop to celebrate the priesthood – the priesthood and Jesus Christ – to be inspired and renewed in our priestly life.

But what a year this has been !! I do not think that any of us can recall a time when the life of people has been so upended – except perhaps the very elder among us who

may recall the circumstances of World War II, or those among us who come from countries beset by civil and regional wars and conflicts, who have had their lives and societies radically upended.

The scriptures for our Chrism Mass are the same ones we use each year. Yet, as I reflect on these – oh how they speak quite differently to me versus just a year and a half ago. I am amazed at how profoundly appropriate they are *this year* – especially now that we have just received what some are already calling the most defining and distinctive encyclical from Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: “On Fraternity and Social Friendship”*

As I begin, I wish to express my profound thanks to all of you. During this past year I have felt and received much support from you as we carry out our priestly ministry in service of the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church for all the People of God – in a very challenging and extraordinary time. I have been inspired and blessed by you all – and for this I am immensely grateful to you. I wish to share this expression and gratitude to all the religious and lay faithful of our Diocese. I continue to be inspired and invited to never underestimate the height, width, and breadth of the life and mission of Jesus Christ, and how God’s people – with great faith, creativity, trust, and zeal – inspire a Christ-like response to new challenges and situations.

In my last Chrism Mass homily with you, I chose to reflect referencing the three munera of the priesthood of Jesus Christ: Christ who is PRIEST, PROPHET, and KING. As I reflected on the most appropriate structure by which I could convey with you many of the insights from *Fratelli Tutti* – and keep the homily to a mere 45 minutes – I thought this structure would be the best way to go.

As the Holy Father says in the opening section of *Fratelli Tutti* – in which he indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the writing and releasing of his encyclical –

“...the pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. ...for all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be

learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.”

So, how does the Priesthood of Jesus Christ help us reflect on these extra-ordinary times as we reflect on the latest teaching from our Holy Father – Pope Francis, and provide us an opportunity for renewal – which is one of the blessings of the annual Chrism Mass.

I first reference Christ as PROPHET. Christ the prophet and teacher is clearly announced by the Lord Himself in today’s Gospel, Luke chapter 4:, when Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry stands up in the synagogue and reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the Poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...” What an appropriate scripture for us to approach *Fratelli Tutti* as Pope Francis extols the Gospel’s call to liberate all peoples from all oppression that mitigates their flourishing.

As you know – the ministry of the WORD – is a call to be His prophets: by our life, witness, preaching and teaching – we point to Christ, His Good News; and the proclamation of His Kingdom – a kingdom that is in this world, but not of this world. By our life and witness, we proclaim Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who is visible, real, present. *Fratelli Tutti* has much to say to us in our ministerial priesthood. It also has very much to say for the common priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis reminds us early on about the call to *propose vs. impose* in a difficult time and world. As he states,

“[St. Francis] did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God. ...Only the man who approaches others, not to draw them into his own life, but to help them become every more fully themselves, can truly be called a father.” (#4)

The ability to truly speak with the mind and heart of Jesus Christ has taken on a new challenge in a world of seeming information and hyper-connectivity. The pope states that we now live in a time of much ‘information without wisdom.’

“True wisdom demands an encounter with reality. ...A mechanism of selection comes into play, whereby I can immediately separate likes from dislikes, what I

consider attractive from what I deem distasteful. In the same way, we can choose the people with whom we wish to share our world.” (#47)

The Holy Father goes on to point out that it is the neighbour we can lose sight of – especially the neighbour on the fringes – the fringes of our sight and concern. And, even people who declare that they are ‘people of faith’ can be quite un-Christ like in their tendencies.

“There are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different. Faith, and the humanism it inspires, must maintain a critical sense in the face of these tendencies. ...For this reason, it is important that catechesis and preaching speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sister.” (#86)

Teaching and witnessing to the social meaning of existence is a particular feature of this encyclical. Pope Francis describes this feature as distinctive of human beings, who are made by God to develop and find fulfillment “...in the sincere gift of self to others.” (#87) As he states,

“I communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with the other. No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others, without having real faces to love. This is part of the mystery of authentic human existence. ‘Life exists where there is belonging, communion, fraternity,; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationship and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails.” (#87)

The Holy Father states that we can never reduce our relationships to a small group, and that our relationships, if healthy and true, will always continually open us to others who expand and enhance our own lives.

In Chapter Six in the section titled ‘Dialogue and Friendship in Society’ the Pope reflects on technology and the internet as a tool for the sake of the human subject. We need to be careful that the person is subordinated to the tool. As the Pope states,

“The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God. We need constantly to ensure that present-day forms of communication are in fact guiding us to generous

encounter with others, to honest pursuit of the whole truth, to service, to closeness to the underprivileged and to the promotion of the common good. ...we cannot accept a digital world designed to exploit our weaknesses and bring out the worst in people.” (#205)

Brother clergy – lay faithful of God – as I reflect on these teachings, I am challenged in the following ways, ^{about} my sharing in the ministry and way of Christ as Prophet:

➤ ***Does my preaching and teaching reflect ALL that the Gospel demands and addresses, including topics and themes that are awkward or difficult to address with the people entrusted to my pastoral care?***

➤ ***Do I commit to really relating to others in my life and ministry, or do I allow administration and technology to be a substitute for belonging, communion, and fraternity?***

Now some reflection on Christ as KING. The text quoted from the prophet Isaiah, today’s 1st reading, is also the text quoted by Jesus from the scroll in the Gospel. The nuance in this case is that priests who are to rebuild Israel’s ruined cities and build up the people *because of their special relationship with God!* As the last versus highlight, the nations will know Israel’s status as blessed by the One God, because of how they rebuild their people, their cities, their nation. Notice what it is that the priests are helping to build? In what is always a counter-cultural witness ...it is not themselves!

Sharing in His ministry of WITNESS – we are called to be His priestly shepherds: servant leaders who take as our inspiration and guide about all leadership ...the Servant King and Good Shepherd Himself, Jesus Christ. *Fratelli Tutti* has much to say to us about this aspect of the mission of Jesus Christ for our priesthood.

The Encyclical names a major concern in regards to how words are used to sow discouragement and resentment, with the aim of seeking a new form of manipulation and control. As the Holy Father states,

“The best way to dominate and gain control over people is to spread despair and discouragement, even under the guise of defending certain values. ...hyperbole, extremism and polarization have become political tools. Employing a strategy of ridicule, suspicion and relentless criticism, on a variety of ways one denies the right of others to exist or to have an opinion. Their share of the truth and their value are

rejected and, as a result, the life of society is impoverished and subjected to the hubris of the powerful. (#15)

The Holy Father goes on to address how this poisons political life, which is meant to be an environment of active participation and responsible engagement by all citizens, all people.

“Political life no longer has to do with healthy debates about long-term plans to improve people’s lives and to advance the common good, but only with slick marketing techniques primarily aimed at discrediting others. In this craven exchange of charges and counter-charges, debate degenerates into a permanent state of disagreement and confrontation.” (#15)

The Encyclical describes that we need to move from circles of concern that are only about a group of people close to my own concerns, to a true care for all peoples. If we do not cease the retreat from the concern from “us” to “just me”, we will continue to create, as Francis states, “...a shallow, short-sighted culture ... bereft of a shared vision ...and once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars, albeit under the guise of noble claims.” (#17) In this scenario, [and what is really scary], we perpetuate a ‘throw-away world’, where “...parts of our human family... can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of existence.”

The Encyclical warns that when only a small part of humanity benefits – many forms of injustice will persist and develop. As it states, [these are] “...fed by reductive anthropological visions and by a profit-based economic model that does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings.” (#22) In this state-of-affairs people’s human dignity is compromised on many fronts, including: how we treat other cultures, other groups or ‘classes of people; the relationship between men and women; and so on.

As the vocation to fraternity continues to deteriorate, ‘encounter’ gives way to fear and more fear, and the only way to respond is to build up walls ... many walls!

“Once more we encounter the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people. And those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have build. They are left without horizons, for they lack this interchange with others.”

Thus, Pope Francis calls the Church to be engaged in the process of building a better world. The Church is not to be on the sidelines. “While respecting the autonomy of political life, ...the Church has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities.” (#276)

Brother clergy – lay faithful of God – as I reflect on these teachings, I am challenged in the following ways ^{about} my sharing in the ministry and way of Christ as King and Servant Leader of His Father’s holy people:

➤ ***As a pastor and servant leader, how do I always model the priority of responsible service to all God’s people, especially those on the periphery?***

➤ ***Do I choose magnanimity and humility over power and control?***

Finally, some reflections on Christ as PRIEST. The prophetic and apocalyptic passage from the Book of Revelation in our 2nd reading exalts Jesus Christ as *the One* who loves and frees us from our sins by His blood. Because of this unprecedented and unique action in human and creation history, God’s people are made to be a kingdom of priests serving *God’s plan of salvation*. “Every eye will behold Him ... *even those who pierced Him*.” (Rev. 1:7) Christ the PRIEST reveals to us the unique way of SACRIFICE. It is by His SACRIFICE that we are continually renewed as priests. Our sharing in the life of the Church and in the life of God’s people features the privilege and duty to administer the life-giving Sacraments and provide pastoral care for the People of God. We are to be zealous and faithful in making these Sacraments always available to God’s people, who need this excellent nourishment and support as they bring the light and hope of Christ to a hungry and searching world. This is also our nourishment and support, as we are fed and shaped by Christ the High Priest.

The issue of being clear as to what kingdom and salvific plan I serve as a bishop has been on my mind much lately. In this extraordinary situation of the pandemic – the Church is having to relate to and work with government and medical authorities in

unprecedented ways. Furthermore, as we survey the state of the lives of our parish congregations, new and more urgent pastoral tasks are rearing their heads.

For example, recently the Alberta and NWT Bishops wrote a pastoral letter entitled: “On the Impact of COVID-19 and the Call to Christian Renewal.” In this letter they describe how the pandemic has alerted us to a number of important social issues that touch us all including:

- the care of vulnerable persons in our society and supports offered to medical personnel in hospitals, nursing homes and other care facilities;
- the education of our young people and supports offered to families and to educators;
- isolation and depression in our homes and communities, and the prevalence and stigma of mental illness, substance abuse, suicide and other social ills;
- increased rates of domestic violence, elder abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence;
- societal discord over different responses to COVID-19 that have fractured human relationships and challenged our call to love one another;
- incidents of racism, bigotry and religious intolerance, including in our towns and cities;
- anxieties caused by massive losses of employment and the general situation of economic instability;
- the fragility of our human condition and the basic needs we all have for safety, solidarity, and love within authentic human community.

What is to be our response to this enormously challenging state of affairs.

3. Of course there are many opinions and perspectives on this complex theme. One perspective I am hearing much about and admit my own interest in is the demise of our democratic and social environments.

One example I cite is the Canadian political author, Jonathan Manthorpe, whose most recent book is titled “Restoring Democracy in an Age of Populists & Pestilence.” (Fascinating title, isn’t it!)

Manthorpe's thesis is that the art and practice of democracy in Canada and other parts of the world has seriously deteriorated. As he states:

“As in other North Atlantic nations, a serious democratic deficit has metastasized through the Canadian body politic in recent decades. ... It is hard to find anyone, especially among those directly involved, who is happy with the way the Canadian political system is working today. And there is no shortage of politicians, partisans, academics and others who have written books, essays and reports brimming with ideas for remedies. The problem is the simple and perennial one in these kinds of circumstances: Who has the political will to rise to the occasion and confront the challenges the country faces?”

Manthorpe goes on to suggest that the current pandemic may be an opportunity for political renewal. As he states:

“To this end, there may prove to be a lasting benefit from the COVID-19 pandemic. The enormity of its assault on all aspects of Canadian life has provoked a readiness to examine national values, constraints and balances of power. It is possible that the coronavirus will inspire action on some fundamental rethinking on political, democratic, economic and cultural priorities.”

Manthorpe warns that failure to reform our political system and methodology will result in further crisis.

“The danger for Canada is that its democratic deficit will get worse and potentially become fatal unless it is addressed and remedied. The politics of fear and hatred are already well-established in several parts of the country... and those infections are being fed by unscrupulous partisans. Meanwhile, there is the proliferation of social media as the medium that brings most Canadians their news and which for commercial purposes tries to ensure the news they are sent *reinforces what they already believe*. This is a recipe for polarization of society... Left unreformed, large segments of the Canadian voting public will soon be fixed in extreme views and beyond the reach of centrist political influence.”

While I am intrigued with Manthorpe's astute examination and critique, I am even more intrigued by the response of the Gospel, and Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*. While issues of crisis in secular institutions has always been a feature of our common human history, the actual redemption in all of this comes from the only real saviour of the world.

As PRIESTS, we examine and meditate always on the **person and way of Jesus Christ**. A few brief quotes from the encyclical that I think illumine this theme:

➤ **On the true care and support of the vulnerable:**

“We are still ‘illiterate’ when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable member of our developed society...we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love.” (see #64 ; #68) “Charity is at the heart of every healthy and open society, yet today it is easily dismissed as irrelevant for interpreting and giving direction to moral responsibility. (#184)

➤ **Regarding a lesson of the Good Samaritan parable:** “...belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way please to God.” (#74)

➤ **On ‘Excellence’ as applied not only to political and economic systems, but to moral development for true human development:**

“Seeking and pursuing the good of others ...also implies helping individuals and societies to mature in the moral values that foster integral human development....striving for excellence and what is best for others.

➤ **Regarding Solidarity as a key feature of priestly service:**

“Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. And service in great part means “caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable members of our families, our society, our people”. In offering such service, individuals learn to “set aside their own wishes and desires, their pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable... Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, ‘suffers’ that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people”. (#115)”

➤ **Regarding the priority of closeness with the ‘poor’:** Pope Francis cites the Latin American Bishops who observed that:

“...only the closeness that makes us friends can enable us to appreciate deeply the values of the poor today, their legitimate desires, and their own manner of living the faith. The option for the poor should lead us to friendship with the poor.” (#234)

➤ **On Gratuitousness as a feature of priestly service:**

“...the ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves, without concern for personal gain or recompense. Gratuitousness makes it possible for us to welcome the stranger, even though this brings us no immediate tangible benefit. Some countries, though, presume to accept only scientists or investors. ...Life

without fraternal gratuitousness becomes a form of frenetic commerce, in which we are constantly weighing up what we give and what we get back in return. (#139; #140)

- **On Keeping our feet on the ground**, in the place God puts us now, versus trying to be God when we clearly are not:

“...we also need to look to the local, which keeps our feet on the ground. ...the local has to be eagerly embraced, for it possesses something that the global does not: it is capable of being a leaven, of bringing enrichment, of sparking mechanisms of subsidiarity. (#142)

- **On the need for Change and Ongoing Conversion:**

Everything, then, depends on our ability to see the need for a change of heart, attitudes and lifestyles.... (watch for) ...human weakness, the proclivity to selfishness that is part of what the Christian tradition refers to as “concupiscence”: the human inclination to be concerned only with myself, my group, my own petty interests. (#166)

- **On the priority of forgiveness and reconciliation:**

Forgiving does not mean forgetting. ...Free and heartfelt forgiveness is something noble, a reflection of God’s own infinite ability to forgive. ...Those who truly forgive do not forget. Instead, they choose not to yield to the same destructive force that caused them so much suffering. They break the vicious circle; they halt the advance of the forces of destruction. They choose not to spread in society the spirit of revenge that will sooner or later return to take its toll. (#251; #252)

I come back to the Alberta and NWT bishops who highlight the response of Christ-like witness that is the basis of true hope in response to the problematic social issues they cite. As they state:

“At the same time, we have witnessed on a daily basis many heroic and selfless examples of individuals who exemplify true human goodness and charity. These are the so-called ‘saints who live next door – medical professional, educators, parents and grandparents, shop workers, cleaners, communications and information technology specialists, law and order personnel, delivery drivers and so many volunteers in all sectors of our society. “

To this list, on this special day I would like to add the many pastors, clergy and religious, and lay ecclesial workers and volunteers who ^{have} been utterly heroic in their quiet and steady witness to the love and care of the Saviour.

Brother clergy – lay faithful of God – as I reflect on these teachings, I am challenged in the following ways ^{about} my sharing in the ministry and way of Christ as Priest:

➤ ***As a bishop I will respond to increasingly complexity and crisis not by withdrawing from larger problems - but choosing the Christ-like response of engagement, vulnerability, and service.***

➤ ***I also seek to be open to the areas of my life and ministry where I need further ongoing conversion of my life and heart.***

Last year I recall sharing with you Pope Francis’s emphasis on the Cross of Christ as a central focus in our lives as PRIESTS. The Cross of Christ has a special and unique meaning for the Priesthood. As Francis states, “True triumph involves “making room for God,” and the only way to achieve such a triumph is by remaining silent, prayerful, accepting humiliation. There is no negotiating with the cross: one either embraces it or rejects it...”

CONCLUSION: And so Brothers, and to all of the People of God – brothers and sisters in our One Lord – I conclude with the cross of Christ – the means of our salvation; the bridge between God and humanity; between death and life; between darkness and light. The Cross is the guide and hope for the world, and it is the Cross of Christ that inspires and guides our reflection and renewal of following the Lord as Prophet, King, and ...PRIEST.

Romans 12:9-12 *Your love must be sincere. Detest what is evil, cling to what is good. Love one another with the affection of brothers. Anticipate each other in showing respect. Do not grow slack but be fervent in spirit; he whom you serve is the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient under trial, persevere in prayer.*