

ADVANCING ALONG THE PATHS OF HOPE

"God continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family. The recent pandemic enabled us to recognize and appreciate once more all those around us who, in the midst of fear, responded by putting their lives on the line. We began to realize that our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious... They understood that no one is saved alone.

I invite everyone to renewed hope, for hope "speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile". Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope." (*Pope Francis "Fratelli Tutti" paras 54 & 55*)

Shortly after addressing some matters concerning what he calls the 'illusion of communication', the Holy Father asks us to consider the deeply human characteristic of our ability to sit down and listen to others, to accept them, to care for them and to welcome them into our lives. He points out that, while the age of technology that makes available many forms of social media widely available, there are some elements of our current experience of communication that in fact diminish our sense of human dignity. He asks us to reflect on what our spiritual sense of community really means in practice. Rather than encouraging free debate and the universal sharing of ideas, which Pope Francis would identify as workings of the Holy Spirit, there is evident a climate of fostering division and separation based on a form of social aggression which has found unparalleled expansion through computers and mobile devices. Individuals who share the same values, principles and ideals can band together to reinforce and encourage each other often at the same time excluding, attacking and blocking alternative positions taken by others. These 'networks' of verbal abuse that shield others from any debate are often characterised by remarkable hostility, insults, abuse and defamation destructive of others. There are many platforms that facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate. The capacity to be able to choose the people with whom we wish to share our world can also lead us to delete persons or situations we find unpleasant or disagreeable and a 'virtual circle' is created which isolates us from the real world in which we are living. It can further entice us to reject all ethical standards and respect for the good name and dignity of others. The Holy Father asks us a simple but powerful question: "How can this contribute to the fraternity that our common Father asks of us?"

"Together, we can seek the truth in dialogue, in relaxed conversation or in passionate debate. To do so calls for perseverance; it entails moments of silence and suffering, yet it can patiently embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples. The flood of information at our fingertips does not make for greater wisdom. Wisdom is not born of quick searches on the internet nor is it a mass of unverified data. That is not the way to mature in the encounter with truth." (*Pope Francis: "Fratelli Tutti" para 50*)

Reflection:

1. How much time do I spend on 'social media' devices? Is it proportionate?
2. How willing am I to accept without question its contents?
3. How willing am I to reject out of hand what is unpleasant?
4. Am I tempted to deny dignity to persons who may express a different view or dismiss them out of hand?
5. Am I tempted to engage in 'verbal violence', defamation, or slander?

Prayer for the Plenary Council

Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.
O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the
Plenary Council.

Give us the grace to see your face in one another and
to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.
Give us the courage to tell our stories and to speak boldly of your truth.
Give us ears to listen humbly to each other and a
discerning heart to hear what you are saying.

Lead your Church into a hope-filled future, that we
may live the joy of the Gospel.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, bread for the journey
from age to age.
Amen.

Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.

St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.