

STARTING ANEW

"Each day offers us a new opportunity, a new possibility. We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies. Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. Like the chance traveller in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen. We may often find ourselves succumbing to the mentality of the violent, the blindly ambitious, those who spread mistrust and lies. Others may continue to view politics or the economy as an arena for their own power plays. For our part, let us foster what is good and place ourselves at its service.

We can start from below and, case by case, act at the most concrete and local levels, and then expand to the farthest reaches of our countries and our world, with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man's injuries. Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, because there we will discover all the goodness that God has planted in human hearts. Difficulties that seem overwhelming are opportunities for growth, not excuses for a glum resignation that can lead only to acquiescence. Yet let us not do this alone, as individuals. The Samaritan discovered an innkeeper who would care for the man; we too are called to unite as a family that is stronger than the sum of small individual members. For "the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts". Let us renounce the pettiness and resentment of useless in-fighting and constant confrontation. Let us stop feeling sorry for ourselves and acknowledge our crimes, our apathy, our lies. Reparation and reconciliation will give us new life and set us all free from fear." (*Pope Francis: "Fratelli Tutti" paras 77 & 78*)

The Holy Father gives us a wonderful exposition of the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan that we find in Luke's Gospel (Lk: 10:25-37). There is no doubt that message of Jesus contained in this parable has been so influential in determining many of the works of the Order over the last century. Pope Francis, with his typical pastoral focus, leads us into a reflection of the various 'characters' in the parable and applies those reflections into our current age and circumstances. At one point he makes the observation: "And if we extend our gaze to the history of our own lives and that of the entire world, all of us are, or have been, like each of the characters in the parable. All of us have in ourselves something of the wounded man, something of the robber, something of the passers-by, and something of the Good Samaritan." It is fairly easy for us to sometimes to be dismissive of the failings of the robbers and the passers-by, to have some sympathy for the wounded victim, to admire the willingness of the inn-keeper, and to applaud the Good Samaritan. Sometimes we can even compare others around us with the same characters and render judgement accordingly. It is not so easy – or perhaps even comfortable – for us to see that there are elements of each of those figures that we can identify in ourselves. We are not all pure Good Samaritans all the time after all although we would like to be. How often have we 'crossed the road' so as to avoid addressing an issue? How often have we involved, or been involved by, others either deliberately or thoughtlessly in failing to respond to a need? But beneath all of our faults there is instilled in us a sense of goodness that will not be silenced. The Holy Father encourages us to honesty with ourselves and inspires us to a faith-filled action to be the "neighbour" that Jesus is describing. He calls us to constantly 'start anew'.

Reflection:

1. How alert am I to the genuine needs of others? How determined am I to meet those needs completely?
2. When aware of a situation of need how often am I inclined to respond with "it can't be fixed" or "what can I do?"
3. Does Jesus' definition of a 'neighbour' as one who helps all no matter what the barriers (social, real or imagined) describe me?

Serenity Prayer

Lord,
give me the courage to change the things I can,
the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
And the wisdom to know the difference.