



# The Precious Blood Family

MAGISTERIUM PASTORAL CHARITY SPIRITUALITY ST. GASPAR CHURCH SOCIETY ENVIRONMENT

## A STRANGER ON THE ROAD

*Compassion is the  
Language of the  
Spirituality of the  
Precious Blood*

*Am I Moved to  
Compassion?*

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## FAITH IN THE GOODNESS OF STRANGERS

From childhood we are taught to approach strangers with caution and suspicion. Do not reveal your name, share too much about your personal life or your whereabouts. The default feeling is that strangers could harm you. The default thinking is that strangers come and intrude on your life. The default response is protectionism. We have to protect our way of life, religion, ethnicity, boundaries and traditions because aliens are coming to violate all that. And so the safest thing to do is keep the door shut to strangers. Among strangers we feel we cannot have the level of trust, vulnerability and accountability that we would with the people we know. It is not uncommon then to see, believe and expect bad outcomes rather than good ones when it comes to strangers.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the last person we would expect to offer help becomes the angel of life for a traveller left for dead. The unlikely hero becomes the main character of the story. It is the stranger who sees the man abandoned by the wayside just as he is, not as he wishes him to be.

The priest and levite who, by their titles should be good

neighbours, looked at the plight of the traveller and chose to walk away. They stood with the robbers by their indifference to a face of pain and suffering. I wouldn't be surprised if instead they gave the man lying injured by the wayside advice with all their finest preaching. Titles, money, and power disappear, however, when confronted with the face of Jesus revealed in the stranger, especially when that face is bruised, despised, with no esteem, formless, different and distant. "Now there are only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by; those who bend down to help and those who look the other way and hurry off (*Fratelli tutti* 70).

I for one have met so many strangers during the pandemic who are in the frontlines binding up our wounds and taking us to the inn where we can become well again. Through them I have found renewed faith in the goodness of strangers. Through them I have come to believe anew that "God is not distant: he is "Emmanuel," God-with-us. He is no stranger: he has a face, the face of Jesus" (Pope Benedict XVI).

*Jerome A. Hologa*

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You can support the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and their apostolate. We appreciate any donation to help defray postage and printing costs; the suggested annual is \$30.00. We are most grateful for additional contributions to advance our apostolate. Please make checks payable to ***Unio Sanguis Christi***. Tax receipts are issued in January of each year.

### *Come follow me*

Christ's shedding His Blood was for St. Gaspar and is for us the sign of God's great love for all people. This spirituality of the Blood continues to impel us to build community through the inclusion of the marginalized, to walk in solidarity with those who suffer, and to seek reconciliation in a divided world. St. Gaspar reminded his missionaries, "unlike statues, missionaries are not motionless, they serve wherever God will call them." Discover your call with us at [www.discoverthecall.org](http://www.discoverthecall.org)

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The Spirituality of the Precious Blood is meant to be shared; as such we are forever grateful for your interest and passion in continuing our Spirituality. *The Union Sanguis Christi* (USC) embraces individuals and groups who commit themselves to live and promote Precious Blood Spirituality. You are welcome to join us through our Spirituality.

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**Fr. John Colacino invites you to follow his weekly blog at [sanguischristi.com](http://sanguischristi.com).**



## “A STRANGER ON THE ROAD”

By Fr. John Colacino, C.P.P.S

As the title of the second chapter of *Fratelli tutti* suggests, Pope Francis undertakes a commentary on the Parable of the Good Samaritan as a model of human fraternity. The story is familiar enough. And soon Francis challenges us to locate ourselves within the parable among its several characters all the while keeping the focus on the unfortunate victim lying wounded on the roadside – someone who, by the way, is nameless, faceless, and indeed a stranger to all who pass by as well as to the one who stops and helps.

I suppose that is the reason behind so much of our indifference to suffering – the wounded are unknown to us. They are among those “far off” ones who are different from us and so difficult to recognize as someone “like me.” And if not a stranger by reason of identity, then because the wounded are among those shielded by anonymity – theirs and mine – since I am never found in places where such strangers dwell in that hinterland between Jericho and Jerusalem. In other words, I am a Samaritan to them, and they to me.

I think, for example, of the distance – far more than six feet – that the pandemic has placed between people, for however good a reason. The fear of contagion has made all of us wary of coming too close to the masked

neighbor whom we meet along the way. Like the priest and Levite in the parable who were unwilling to risk ritual impurity should they touch what might well have been a corpse we pass quickly by lest we too end up in the same ditch. Then there are the millions of people who have succumbed to the virus worldwide most of whom will be strangers who come no closer than the daily news – safely distanced behind television or computer screens in far off India, Brazil and who knows where else.

I am also thinking of the immigrant and refugee “stranger” who lies in ever-greater number at the southern border of the United States, mostly children seeking to escape cycles of poverty, violence and hopelessness. Can we really be indifferent and hostile to people who, for the most part, are fellow Catholics, members of the Body of Christ? Can I continue to receive the Eucharist in good conscience when my own brothers and sisters remain on the roadside wounded by the effects of political corruption, drug cartels and a foreign policy that has contributed to the situations faced by these neighbors of mine? And now that these “far off” ones have been “brought near,” I can’t pretend they are strangers any longer.

Of course, turning aside from strangers on the road is all too human, especially when their plight does not, seemingly, affect me directly or when I have simply been numbed by the sheer magnitude of their suffering. Still, the papal encyclical hopes more from us.



Francis insists that, “We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity” (no. 68).

Of special interest to readers of this magazine, Pope Francis goes on to say that, “We likewise believe that Christ shed his blood for each of us and that no one is beyond the scope of his universal love” (no. 85). “Stranger danger” is, therefore, a fear unworthy of Christians, even when a degree of risk is involved in approaching whoever lies along our path. For the first Stranger to become a Good Samaritan has stooped to assist us; his own wounds assuaging our own, and his relentless concern for our welfare giving us hope of healing. In other words, the One who has shown us mercy and bids us, “Go and do likewise.”(cf. Lk 10:37).

### Questions for Personal Reflection

1. Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Place yourself in each of its characters: victim, robber, lawyer, priest, Levite, Samaritan, and innkeeper. Explore each character’s goals, values, and spiritual imagination. How are you like each character?
2. How does the call to be a neighbor for all challenge you on issues of our day: homelessness, human trafficking, immigration, interracial relations, inequality, ecology, etc?

## A STRANGER ON THE ROAD: A C.P.P.S PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

*By Fr. Phillip Smith, C.P.P.S*

**V**isions / visionaries, dreams / dreamers have been a part of human existence. Certainly, in the Judeo-Christian traditions, one only need scan the Scriptures to discover their importance. Where would be today without dreaming? The most recent Encyclical letter of Pope Francis, "Fratelli tutti" / "Brothers and Sisters All" gives us a most recent example of an elderly man who has not lost his capacity to dream. I wish to concentrate on chapter two of the encyclical entitled "A Stranger on the Road" viewing it through the perspective of our Precious Blood spirituality. What does this chapter teach me as a C.P.P.S. pastor and how can it be fleshed out in a post-pandemic world?

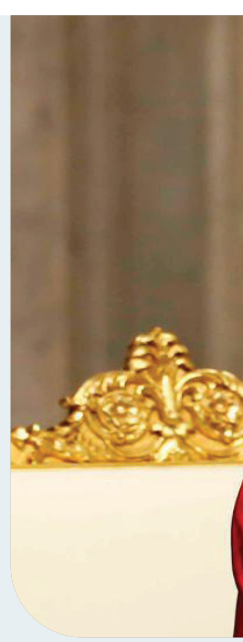
The focus of chapter two is outward looking. It is no wonder that the Pope opens it by relating

one of the most famous and beloved stories in the New Testament, the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). In a recent article in The New Wine Press, newsletter of the Kansas City Province, (May 2021), Father Ron Will relates how the theme of the encyclical compliments our Precious Blood spirituality and how this has given him a "vision that reveals how God looks at the human family and reminds [him] that we really are one family created by God". Like leaven in the dough his mother made for bread, so too are we leaven that must be kneaded into the fabric of life in a post-pandemic world assisting people to become life-giving bread to one another.

And those along our roads, who are they? During the pandemic, when even we priests were not allowed into hospitals to minister, family members lamented

the fact even they could not even see their loved ones. In situations of those who died, the isolation, the despair and loneliness of the family became more acute. Presiding at funerals without Mass in funeral homes, though a common practice before the pandemic struck, was a novelty for many people. Limitations of ten or less made it more difficult. People, including us priests, despaired and lamented. All we could do was comfort people from a distance. Once we are allowed to open again for public worship and have gatherings, these will be one of the first groups to bring those far off near in the Blood of Christ (cf. Eph 2,13).

The Pope speaks of how the parable is a challenge to "rebuild our wounded







world” (no. 67) by being Good Samaritans to help relieve pain and sorrow. Who are others wounded and hurting along our streets who need the bandage of compassion? Our youth, often isolated and separated from each other, are another often misunderstood group which can be brought close to a faith that has not abandoned them. It will be good for us ministers to reach out to them, often known as visioners, many of them were far from the faith, pre-pandemic times, and are now even further distanced. Fortified with our spirituality of reconciliation and hope, how can we make them feel at home once again, especially when faith seems out

of touch with reality? Perhaps small group discussions, “faith shared around the table,” could be an avenue to pursue.

All of us, as the Pope states, “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” (no. 77). What a challenge for us! Not unlike the times of St. Gaspar (1808-1837) when he founded the Missionaries to be the spark, the sign and the means for reviving and renewing the faith in a people who had lost it. The two examples above are not the only ones who need revival. There are others: people who have lost sources of revenue,

people who have turned to substances to relieve the pain and who become addicted to them. The Pope concludes this chapter by stating “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 sisters” (no. 86). These people, like the man in the parable, lie along our streets today. Lifting up their spirits and reviving their drooping hearts are some of the challenges we face. We trust in a Spirit who will vision us to dream of new ways to evangelize them.

## THE GOOD SAMARITAN AND THE CARE FOR THE ENVIROMENT

*By Dcn. Jerome A. Hologa, C.P.P.S*

As we humans have been ravaged by the Coronavirus and sent into collective lockdown, it appears nature is curing itself. As the pandemic restricted human movements and activities, reports of cleaner air and skies emerged across the globe especially from places with the worst records of air pollution. NASA reported a 20% decrease in levels of nitrogen dioxide concentrations globally in 2020 alone. It seems everywhere flora and fauna are thriving, helping us to breathe cleaner air. Wild animals have been seen moving freely, going to inhabited places where they don't usually show themselves. It is said for the first time in decades people in northern India are able to see the Himalayas from their homes. In general, there is a renewed optimism at nature's regeneration and all it has taken is just a few months' break from humans! To some, such signs of nature's self-healing bring a sense of relief that maybe we haven't destroyed the planet as much as we thought.

I for one do not think the pandemic produced huge gains for the environment. And I join those who have underscored that it will take more than a collective confinement to heal the planet. If anything, the pandemic's impact on nature and on climate change offers a glimpse at how quickly nature can heal itself if we were to become



good stewards of creation, if we commit to a vision of integral ecology and live sustainably. We must approach the “pandemic pause” as a summons to meditate deeply on our interactions with nature.

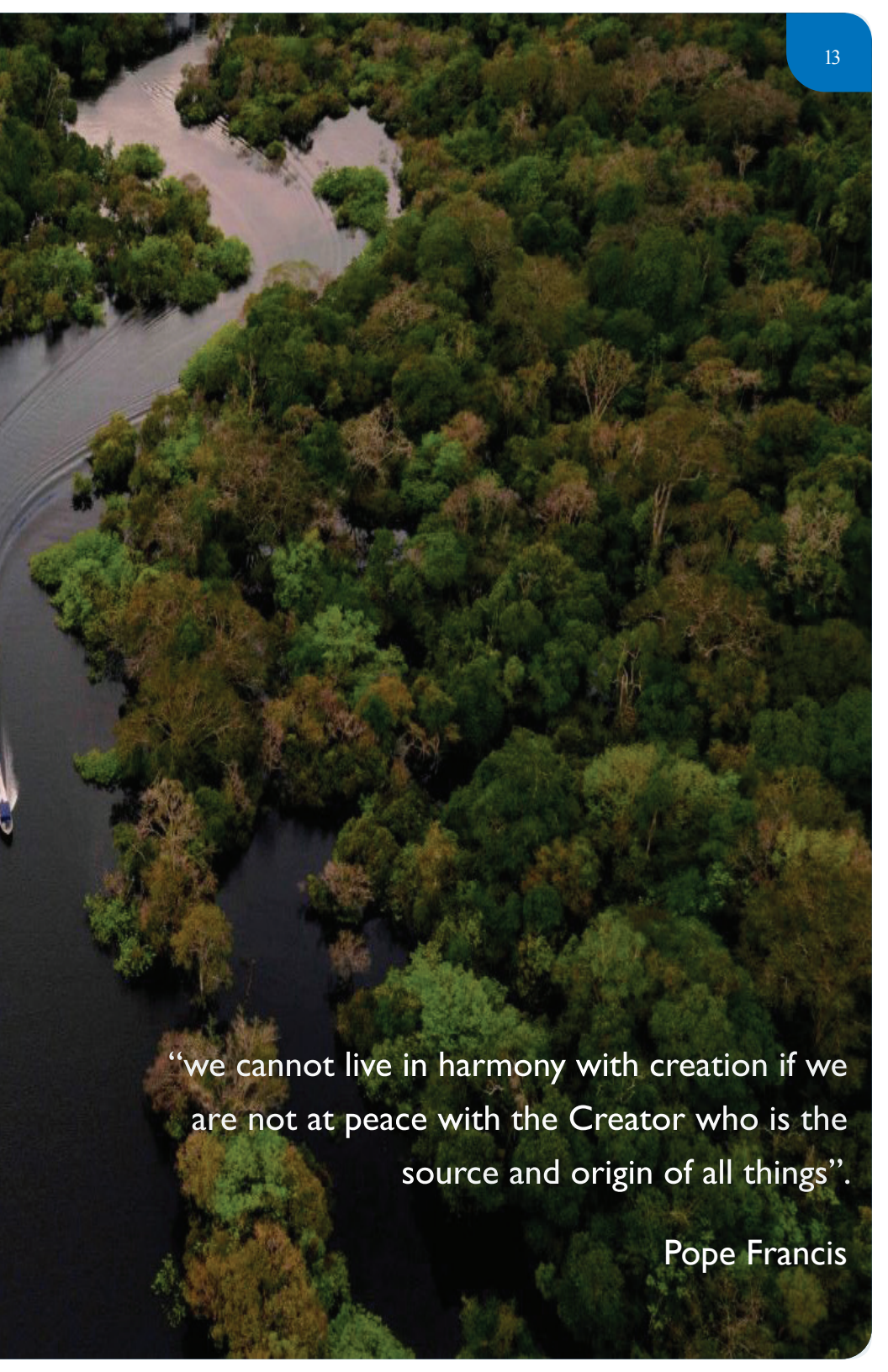


In chapter two of *Fratelli tutti*, *Stranger on the Road*, Pope Francis offers a place to start this meditation or dialogue with ourselves, each other, with creation and with God. In this regard, I find the Parable of the Good Samaritan speaking not only about the interior struggle that each of us experiences when we encounter the face of pain and suffering of those who walk the earth, but also the very earth itself and its ecologies. Like the suffering man on the wayside, the earth is suffering and crying for help. In our interactions with nature each of us embodies the various characters of the parable: a robber who consumes too much of nature’s resources, an indifferent bystander who cares less for the environment, and a Good Samaritan who cares more.



We are well aware of the unprecedented negative consequences triggered by the self-destructive path of robbers and indifferent bystanders. Pope Francis proposes to replace this culture of destruction, neglect and exploitation with a culture of care. We care for one another and for creation, not for some extrinsic gain or out of obligation, but because we are an integral part of creation and we share a common humanity. Today we are all challenged to live according to the spirit of the Good Samaritan which compels us to care for our common home. As co-creators, we have a responsibility to protect this home and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.



An aerial photograph of a lush, dense tropical rainforest. A wide, winding river flows through the forest, its water appearing dark and calm. In the lower-left corner, a small blue boat is visible, moving along the river and leaving a white wake. The forest canopy is a mix of vibrant greens and darker, more muted tones, suggesting a rich and diverse ecosystem. The overall scene is serene and emphasizes the beauty and complexity of the natural world.

“we cannot live in harmony with creation if we are not at peace with the Creator who is the source and origin of all things”.

Pope Francis

## A SACRED ENCOUNTER BIRTHS AN AGENT OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACE

*By Sr. Mary Shaw, ASC*

There is a crimson stream that flows throughout scripture, from Genesis to Revelation and continues today in our cosmic evolutionary times. It is the blood that flows from the heart of God to and through all creation. This blood became the *raison d'être* for St. Maria de Mattias, foundress of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. She had what Pope Francis talks about, an encounter with Jesus, that fills one's heart and life with the "joy of the Gospel." In his Apostolic Exhortation by that title, he says: "I invite all Christians to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them" (Evangelii gaudium #3). The Trinitarian kerygma has to be "The center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts of Church renewal: the fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father's infinite mercy" (no. 164).

For St. Maria De Mattias, this was found in the Precious Blood of Jesus, the mystery of our salvation. From the initial stirrings of the Holy Spirit within her heart, as she gazed upon an image of the Paschal Lamb until the day she drew her final breath, Maria was consumed and on fire to draw all peoples to Jesus and be saved.

She, amidst the daily struggles of living, discerning, and founding a Congregation, availed herself in contemplative prayer so that he was able to encounter her. She experienced deeply Christ Crucified, who gave his life for all. Yes, this transforming encounter, inspired and empowered Maria, motivated Maria and was her sustaining source of energy and joy for the world.



A Canadian communication theorist, Marshall McLuhan, coined a phrase in the mid 60's: "the medium is the message." To me, this phrase captures Maria's encounter with and lived experiences of Jesus. Through her special attraction to the mystery of redemption, symbolized in the precious blood of Christ, her life was forged on the anvil of daily joys, struggles, rejections and wounds inflicted, even by her own Sisters, into becoming a "Living Chalice of Salvation," with her entire life poured out in loving service to all. For Maria, "Life is in the blood poured out in loving service." This was not only the main thread that ran through her entire life but also the "robe of salvation" with which God graced her the whole of her life. Maria was an "unworn messenger" of the precious blood and the pattern of her life as well as that of the Congregation she founded. It too was "be patterned and shaped into a living image of that divine charity with which this divine blood was shed and of which it was and is sign, expression, measure and pledge" (Preface of 1857 Constitution). Charity, charity charity for all, "toward God and our dear neighbor" was her clarion call.

So intimate were Maria's encounters with her beloved Jesus, who penetrated her so deeply, that all who saw her, seemed to recognize his radiance. As Anthony DeMello once said, "How do you separate the dance from the dancer?" There

was a solidarity she found with her lover as she gazed upon the Cross, and with him and because of him she found and exuded peace. For God wanted "all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross" (Col. 1: 20). Maria experienced this mystical union in such a deep way that her personhood became the message. She was more than a messenger. Her yes to the divine Blood was transformative and resulted in her entire life given to reconciling, bringing peace and seeking to establish that "beautiful order of things."

It was Maria's life--her personhood -- perhaps more than her words, that made her such a dynamic agent of reconciliation and peace. She allowed the Holy Spirit to fill her and drink deeply the blood of Jesus so much so, that the chalice of her being was overflowed with graces. Maria felt mandated "to go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:37) and thus, the "cup of her being" in unison with his became -- and still is -- a font for all who desire to know Jesus and to be his reconciling ambassador. This precious stream continues to be our connectivity with each other and all creation. May we be attuned to the "cry of the poor and the cry of creation" and assuage them with the "cup of our being" -- our personhood -- graciously filled with and by the Holy Spirit as we gaze upon our common humanity.

## THE LIVING CHALICE AND LIVING THE EUCHARIST

*By Fr. Winfried Wermter, C.P.P.S*

**A**lthough the chalice is one of the most important instruments used in celebrating the Eucharist, it is still an instrument. In an emergency it can even be dispensed with. Yet the chalice is so close to the Blood of Christ that it assumes a marvelously symbolic strength all its own that can guide us to a deeper understanding of our lives relative to the 'Price of Our Redemption'. In all three major parts of the Eucharistic Celebration (Preparation of Gifts, Eucharistic Prayer, and Communion) the chalice serves the Blood of Christ in such an immediate and varied manner that it itself becomes a sign teaching us how to shape our lives in the service of redemption...

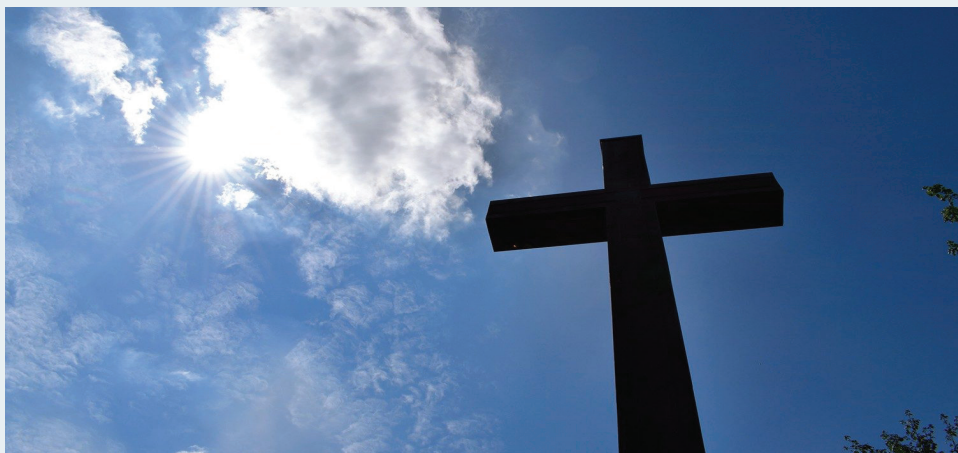
To be a "living chalice" means that we continue our service to the Blood of Christ. Whenever we are filled and directed by God's word, whenever we transform our lives by God's power and keep offering them as gifts to God, our gifts will also

become gifts to others. The greatest gift that the world is yearning for, consciously or unconsciously, is peace, harmony amidst diversity, and unity. It is only in unity that we are free to discover the happiness for which we were created. What people long for, then, is redemption. But there is no redemption without the Blood of Christ.

If you desire, therefore, to be a chalice that contains and dispenses the Blood of the Redeemer, then continue to live the Eucharist. Neglect no opportunity of collecting wine in your heart, drop by drop, moment by moment. Do not be concerned whether the wine be sweet or dry. What matters is the transformation, the sacrifice, the presence of the redemptive Blood of Christ. Stand at the foot of the Cross with Mary, ready to lose everything. Let not a single drop of the Precious Blood trickle from his side that does not find a place in your heart and is not offered up with trusting love to the







Father!

It is not required that you change the world. What is left in the chalice remains bitter or sweet even after the wine becomes the Blood of Christ. The world does not have to have all its problems solved in order to be saved. What the world needs is Redemption.

Therefore, celebrate the Eucharist by living it. Be a living chalice, but do not talk about it. Mary at the foot of the Cross did not talk either. It suffices that you be present with a trusting faith wherever Christ is bleeding on the Cross for humankind.

Be there with loving heart as Jesus' mother is. Whenever you receive the Blood of Jesus, whenever you remain steadfast in adoring it, whenever you endure pain in silence but extend love to others, then will people beat a path to your door. For they will perceive Mary's presence in you, the presence of a mother.

People are searching for God. They are yearning for God's love. Keep on receiving this love in the Blood at the foot of the Cross. Keep the pain to yourself but grant the light won there by to others until they in turn discover its source and also learn to appreciate and love the Cross. Be a living chalice by being Mary. Be a continuous Communion, a "Font of Mercy". Then you will be bringing redemption to others and you will be establishing unity, because all the while you will be giving them God, who is Love itself."

*Fr. Winfried Wermter, CPPS, 1983,  
Published in Cincinnati Province  
Newsletter, 1985, pp. 20-23*



## WITNESS TO REDEMPTIVE LOVE

*In the second chapter of his encyclical, Fratelli tutti, Pope Francis draws our attention to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan and to the redemptive, merciful, and loving relationship that God desires to have with each one of us. This relationship unites us through His Son's Blood as brothers and sisters and in particular with the most vulnerable among us near and far.*

*By Mary Benincasa*

In the second chapter of his encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis draws our attention to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan and to the redemptive, merciful, and loving relationship that God desires to have with each one of us. This relationship unites us through His Son's Blood as brothers and sisters and in particular with the most vulnerable among us near and far. While reflecting on the significance of all this, I was brought back to a memory of my own journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. It's a memory both of struggle and of witness to redemptive love.

A number of years ago, I spent a summer in the Holy Land. One morning, while staying at Ecce Homo Convent, I sat down for breakfast with a man and two women, both post-graduate students at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem. The three of them were conversing about their plans to hike along the Wadi Qelt between Jerusalem and Jericho the next day. Being up for an adventure, I asked if I might join them on the trek. They agreed and kindly advised me to bring good walking shoes, at least two bottles of water and a

head covering.

The next morning at dawn, we met on the Via Dolorosa and began the day's journey: they with their hiking shoes, backpacks, hats and so on, and me with my worn-out sneakers, knapsack, headkerchief and two small bottles of water. The plan was to walk along the valley's riverbed, which should have been dry during the summer months. Soon after arriving at the opening to the desert valley, I was surprised to discover that the riverbed was not made of sand or pebbles but large rocks and boulders, and on a number of occasions as we trudged along my companions had to help me climb over some of the higher boulders.

The intention to walk along the valley was short-lived because for long stretches the riverbed was not dry and the water was too deep for us to wade through; so instead we headed up the desert mountainside to walk along the steep ledges and man-made water canals. As we journeyed, I could hear my companions rhapsodizing about the magnificent Judean landscape, something my fear-stricken mind

was unable to appreciate at the moment.

These good companions generously helped me navigate some of the most fearful situations. The man, who was familiar with the desert, at one point held out his hand for me when the path broke off and we had to jump over the gap to get to the other side. All three guided me when the ledge narrowed under the protruding mountainside, forcing us to hold onto the rock formation as we inched along the nearby, non-existent ledge. If it were not for my three companions' unwavering care, my fear alone would have pushed me over the edge.

Repeatedly, they demonstrated a persistent merciful presence to me. As we neared Jericho, I started shaking with fever from heat exhaustion. We finally came across a cave and rested in its shade away from the scorching sun. Feeling guilt for having slowed down these three companions the way I did, I recall asking them to go ahead to Jericho without me and to simply send someone back for me in the morning. They compassionately decided that the two women would stay behind with me, while the man would go ahead to Jericho and arrange for some assistance. While sitting with me under the shade of the cave's opening, one of the women took out her last water bottle and generously poured it over my head in an attempt to cool me down.

Shortly afterwards, the man returned with the good news that Jericho was just above us. He had

arranged for a vehicle to bring me to a religious residence where I would receive care. My fever subsided the next morning and I was informed that a teachers' pilgrim group had offered to take me back to Jerusalem. My three companions were nowhere to be found that morning and so I was not able to thank them again for the care they had shown this stranger.

What Pope Francis observes about the Samaritan could equally be applied to my companions. He expresses, "Certainly he had his own plans for the day, his own needs, commitments and desires. Yet he was able to put all that aside when confronted with someone in need. Without even knowing the injured man, he saw him as deserving of his time and attention."

Pope Francis asserts that there is a summons for all of us in Jesus' parable – a call to be present to the other, to companion the other as "fratelli tutti" – whether family, friend or stranger, whether close at hand or on the other side of our planet. The Author of redemptive love entreats, "Go and do likewise." That is an especially vital summons for us today as we witness past and present societal wounds being exposed and as divergent politics, worldviews, and self-expressions keep on dividing us. Can we stand by our "Fratelli ... TUTTI"?

May the healing redemptive Blood of Christ give us the necessary vigour to follow His command!

## WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR? *By Denise Araiche*

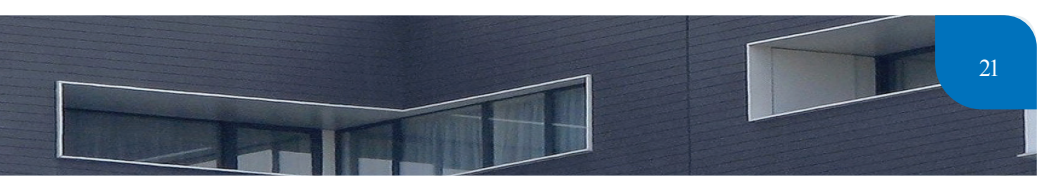


Reading the second chapter of Fratelli tutti brings to mind the charisma of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood who believe the presence of God is among us and those whom they serve. They are called to “support and nurture” them wherever they go. Hunkered down at home in this pandemic, it is hard to think of being supportive and nurturing when everyone from the medical experts, to the government, to friends and family are telling everyone to stay home. Yet, in the darkest times, God’s fingerprints are everywhere. He sheds light on opportunities that we, as a Christian people, can grasp. It’s a matter of turning our inward gaze outward, to “the other”. If we are suffering during lockdown, so are others. In Luke’s gospel, a lawyer asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbour” and Jesus proceeds to tell him a parable about the Samaritan man who helps someone robbed and beaten. “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (Gal 5:14).

But how can we show hospitality in these times, let alone reach our neighbour? A parish where I attend had a wonderful way of “reaching our neighbour.” When there was a mandate to reduce church attendance to 30% of the church’s capacity, we thought it was such a blow to churchgoers, even if that was better than a total lockdown. The parish drew up protocols and taped down pews and decided, since many of our ushers were older and therefore targeted by the pandemic, a new greeter/ushering ministry (greeters)

was needed. The call from the pulpit for volunteers was astounding. People, who had never volunteered before, decided to step up. We had volunteers of families, husband and wife teams, young adults, and even neophytes who had just become Catholic earlier that year.

The organizers were overwhelmed and touched by the generosity of these volunteers and we were ready for the first Masses. At the beginning of the pandemic, the parish didn’t realize that a large number of our community was fearful of going anywhere and that included attending Mass. Even though we repeatedly sanitized, we only had a trickle of people coming to church. Those that did come were welcomed and introduced to the new greeters. As the weeks went on, word spread that it was safe to go to church and new people started attending, deeply drawn to the Eucharist and to the community. The relationship between the parishioners and the greeters became quite close. Our greeters were sometimes the only other humans these people saw all week. A bond was formed with our greeters and the faithful. The greeters would notice if someone wasn’t able to make it to Mass or if there were new parishioners who didn’t know the protocols and were fearful. They would follow up on some of the “missing” and we would welcome and orient those that were new, assuring them that we were following protocols. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan”(Pope Francis).



Numbers were up every week until we went into lockdown; when that happened, people were so dismayed. However, our pastor had a great idea. He asked us to continue the greeting ministry by taking it to the phone. He provided the greeters with parishioners' names and phone numbers and the calls started to happen. Every Sunday after the live-streamed Mass, each greeter would call five people. There were three goals in mind. The first was to ensure that all our parishioners knew they were being prayed for, that they were missed and that we intended to check on their well-being. The second was to inform them about the live-streamed Mass and that they could receive a weekly email from the pastor's desk to keep them up-to-date. The third was to gather any intentions they had to be offered every Sunday at Mass and to help in any way that was needed. The calls were so welcomed. There were elderly parishioners who hadn't talked to anyone for weeks and who hadn't had human contact for a year. There were people who had real problems that needed some attention – one of our greeters actually called the cable company on behalf of a parishioner so that she could watch Mass on television. There were parishioners who needed the attention of a priest for the Sacrament of healing or, unfortunately, for funerals. From these calls, more volunteers were garnered. Truly, the hospitality shown allowed the community to stay tight knitted. For those who volunteered, it was very uplifting and rewarding. There were bonds created between families and greeters that probably would not have been formed any other way. The

greeters feel so blessed to be gifted into this ministry.

This is only one example of how people are reaching out to others. Caring for those who are in need (and it may be a silent need), is what Jesus invites the lawyer and all of us to “go and do likewise.” As the Missionaries of the Precious Blood so aptly reflect, showing support and nurturing those we seek out and encounter is a beautiful and easy way to care for the “other”.

Fratelli tutti has challenged me to think of other ways in which I and my community can fulfill its exhortation. For example, at the present time our calling ministry is only contacting those for whom we have a phone number or email address. The next step will be to find out how to contact those who are part of our community but haven't been able to reach. From there we would like to ask, as the lawyer did, “Who is our neighbour?” by moving out into the broader community. Our RCIA programme has been fruitful, but it would be joyous to ramp it up. An invitation to our parishioners to ask family members or neighbours who haven't been participating actively in church life to come to our church to join in a celebration, a prayer or a social event would be a logical next step.

So as we get through this pandemic, we have many opportunities to care for each other. Let us follow Christ's lead, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matt 25:40).

# ON BEING YOUR BROTHER AND SISTER'S KEEPER

*By Bradley Black*



In the second section of the rich and bracing encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis offers an extended reflection on the Good Samaritan. He offers this reflection to call us to an authentic and radical form of Christian living. The Holy Father reflects that each of us can identify with all of the characters in the familiar parable. He comments on the social and personal meanings that arise in the story's message. For example, he reflects on our complicity in injustices, on our woundedness, and on our obligations toward each other. However, the most striking theme is the reminder that we are made for love and for relationships. He writes, "The existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions."

In our world individualism is highly

prized, from the "self-made" person, to the glorified leaders of businesses and organizations. The sin of pride is glorified as a virtue. The Christian faith inverts this value model. We are not here by our own power, we are not sanctified by our own power, and we do not reach heaven by our own power. From the beginning, our faith life is a story of dependence and trust in our Heavenly Father. "Abide in me, as I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-11). True virtue is learning to be dependent and letting others depend on us as well. It is only through dependence that we can learn love and give love. The Holy Father, echoing centuries of church teaching, reminds us that our vocation

is love and that this love must take on a social dimension, what Francis calls the “social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person.”

Pope Francis shines a light on how, in the story told by Christ, the Samaritan is the one who models this call. The Samaritan, perhaps because of his “outsider” status, had a deeper understanding of what it was like to be the wounded man by the roadside. Those consumed by other affairs, the priest and the Levite, avoid him perhaps because it reminds them of their own vulnerability. Only the Samaritan takes the chance to become who he is -- his brother’s keeper.

I don’t think it’s an accident that the story is framed in terms of a hero’s journey, with an outsider and a stranger being the one to restore what is broken. The Samaritan by choosing to love becomes a hero. In the Christian narrative, we become heroes not through conquering others, or conquering circumstances, but by choosing to love those in need. As the pope states, “We were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love.” This love, moreover, “shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; in their place, it builds bridges. Love enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel

at home... Love exudes compassion and dignity.”

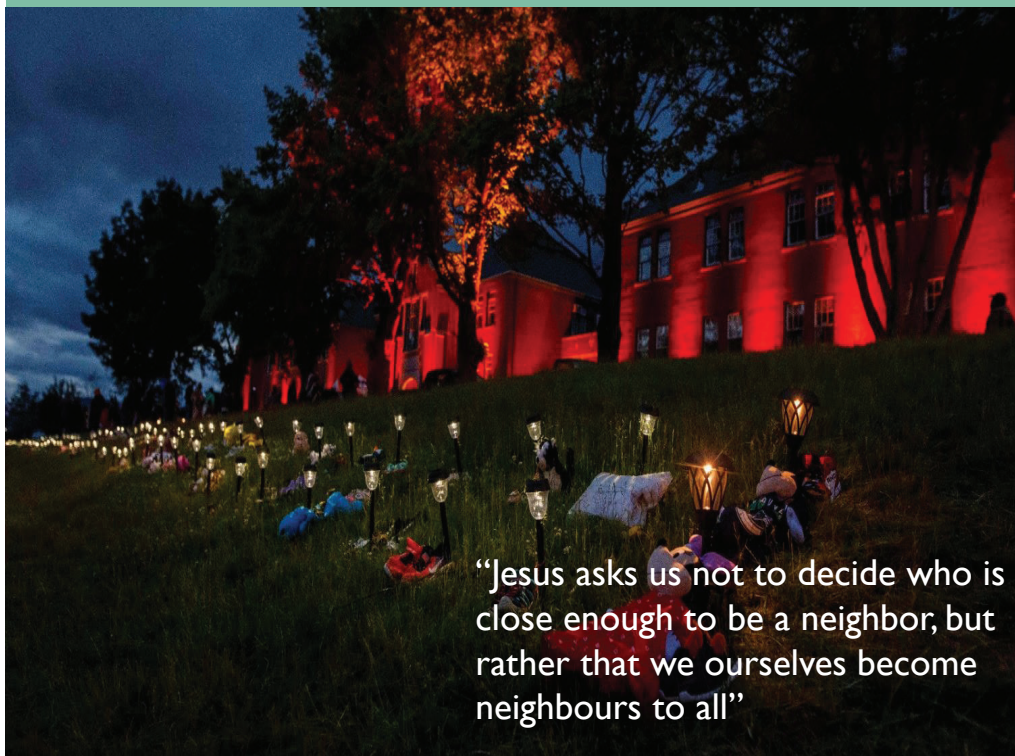
Given these realities we must ask ourselves, “What is holding us back from being the Good Samaritan?” We have been loved by God. Through our baptism he has poured his grace and love into us. Around us are many, many who need our love, people who are no longer strangers but brothers and sisters. The pope reminds us of our fundamental calling and of its true scope, a scope and calling both universal and particular. Universal because love applies to anyone in need, particular because it applies to this person in need, those in our lives at this moment.

May I suggest some further questions to reflect on: “In what ways am I an accomplice with the “robbers” of society?” “Where do I turn a blind eye to injustice and suffering?” “When do I put aside the mere “passing of time” and attend to others for their sake and not my own?” “When I’m with others do I set aside my phone and attend?” “When someone is in need do I go above and beyond to help, or do I worry about the cost of time and energy?”

Finally, given Pope Francis’ concluding reflection on “the plea of the stranger,” where he reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters, “Whom do we identify as strangers in our life?” “What can we do to move towards treating them not as strangers, but as brothers and sisters?”

# Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Atlantic Province

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“Jesus asks us not to decide who is close enough to be a neighbor, but rather that we ourselves become neighbours to all”

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