Reflection on: Hope in Today's World, Pope Francis, January 13th 2021 prepared by Sr Marie

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We are no longer providing video resources every week but may continue to create these important seasons of the year. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation.

If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate in our homes at 7.30pm on Wednesday. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: *Eternal God,* through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction: In the ongoing situation of the pandemic, I was hoping we would have a good start to 2021 leaving the memories of 2020 behind. However it didn't begin the way I expected - with a resurgence of the virus, another national lockdown, social unrest in the United States, whilst on the other hand the emergence now of more vaccines for us here in the UK. This is kind of a positive sign that will be completely positive when it is accessible to all people throughout the world. I am turning once more to the wisdom of Pope Francis to inspire our meditation. In the second half of last year Pope Francis wrote two books; one was entitled *All Brothers and Sisters*, the other, *Let Us Dream.* Both make reference to our present serious situation with Covid 19.

All Brothers and Sisters is on "fraternity and social friendship" and has been described as a brisk walking tour of Pope Francis' social teaching. It is a call for all human persons to recognize and live out our common fraternity. It starts with a consideration of what is holding humanity back from the development of universal fraternity and moves to an expression of hope that peace and unity will be achieved through dialogue among peoples of faith. Fraternity is to be encouraged not only in words, but in deeds. Deeds made tangible in a "better kind of politics", which is not subordinated to financial interests, but to serving the common good, able to place the dignity of every human being at the centre and assure work to everyone, so that each one can develop his or her own abilities.

Personally, I don't like the exclusivity of the word fraternity, with synonyms from the Oxford dictionary noted as world, group, community, network, clan, society, guild… Probably 'community' is the warmest alternative. *Fratelli Tutti*, the original title in Italian, comes from the actual words with which Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. Of the counsels offered, Pope Francis selects the one in which St Francis calls for a love that transcends the

barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother and sisters "as much when that brother or sister is far away as when he/she is close by. In his simple and direct way, St Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives. St Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters.

In the first chapter of his book, Pope Francis speaks of the dark clouds over a closed world in which he considers certain trends in our world that hinder the development of universal fraternity like: shattered dreams, lacking a plan for everyone, globalization and progress without a shared road map, pandemics and other calamities in history, an absence of human dignity on the borders and the illusion of communication.

We, Daughters of Wisdom have taken as our common theme for the years 2012-2018 - *Love without Borders,* which builds on that of the previous six years of *Open Wide you Tent.* It is encouraging when trends come together which for me is a sign of the Spirit in our world.

Pope Francis ends the first chapter with these words: Despite these dark clouds, which may not be ignored, I would like in the following pages to take up and discuss many new paths of hope. For 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. (FT 54)

Pope Francis goes on: 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 fulfilment, 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. (FT 55)

Pope Francis uses the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) to illustrate his points in the second chapter of his book.

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. (FT 77)

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" (Evangelii Gaudium 235). 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, and our lies. Reparation and reconciliation will give us new life and set us all free from fear. (78)

In Pope Francis' other book *Let us Dream* he explains why we must, and how we can, make the world safer, fairer and healthier for all people now. In the Covid crisis he has seen the cruelty and inequity of our society more vividly exposed than ever before. He has also seen in the resilience, generosity and creativity of so many people, the means to rescue our society, economy and our planet. He urges us not to let the pain be in vain…….

He begins *Let us Dream* by exploring what this crisis can teach us about how to handle upheaval of any kind, whether in our lives or the world at large. He reveals how three crises in his own life changed him dramatically for the better. By its very nature, he shows how crisis presents us with a choice. We make the grievous error if we try to return to some pre-crisis state. But if we have the courage to change, we can emerge from the challenge better than before. Francis then offers a brilliant, scathing critique of the systems and ideologies that have conspired to produce the current crisis – from global economy obsessed with profit and heedless of the people and environment it harms to politicians who foment their people's fear and use that to increase their own power at their people's expense. He reminds us a Christian's first duty is to serve others, especially the poor and the marginalised, just as Jesus did.

Here are some inspiring words from *Let us Dream*

- To come out of this better, we have to see clearly, choose well and act right. Let's talk about how. Let us dare to dream.
- We must redesign the economy so that it can offer every person access to a dignified existence while protecting and regenerating the natural world.
- What is the greatest fruit of a personal crisis? I'd say patience, sprinkled with a healthy sense of humour, which allows us to endure and make space for change to happen.
- When I speak of change I mean that those people who are now on the edges become the means of changing society.
- We do not possess the truth so much as the truth possesses us, constantly attracting us by means of beauty and goodness.
- Sin is a rejection of the limits that love requires.
- Our greatest power is not in the respect that others have for us, but the service we can offer others.

Beginning Meditation: Let us prepare now for our meditation. Notice any tightness in your shoulders and neck and allow any tension in your muscles to relax. Allow your back to rest upright. Be conscious of where your body is touching the chair. Ground yourself and allow your breathing to settle, allow your body to slow down. 'Come Wisdom come', 'Maranatha', 'Come Lord Jesus, come.' are all appropriate words to repeat at this time if it will help you.

25-minute meditation

Post Meditation reading:

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. *Vaclav Havel*

Hope sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and achieves the impossible. *Helen Keller*

We are encumbered by old assumptions, burdened by memories that limit our horizons and therefore, unfree to see God coming to us from the future." *Constance Fitzgerald odc*

The human heart can go the lengths of God…
Thank God our time is now when wrong comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take the longest stride of soul a person ever took.
Affairs are now soul size. The enterprise is exploration into God. *Christopher Fry, The Sleep of Prisoners*

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, 2020.*

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. (*Habbakuk 3:17-19)*

Closing prayer: Lord, Father of our human family, you created all human beings equal in dignity: pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and peace. Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war. May our hearts be open to all the peoples and nations of the earth. May we recognise the goodness and beauty you have sown in each of us, and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects, and shared dreams. Amen

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon. Stay well and stay safe.

Resources: *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis, October 2020; *Let us Dream*, Pope Francis,December 2020





Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.