

PLEASE WEAR MASKS, PLEASE STAY DISTANCED, PLEASE TAKE CARE OF ONE ANOTHER, WE HAVE TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT OUR FAITH AND THAT HAS NO ROOM FOR SELFISH AND HARMFUL BEHAVIOR. PUBLIC HEALTH IS NOT ABOUT POLITICS, IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE, CATHOLIC MORAL TEACHING IS CRYSTAL CLEAR IN MAINTAINING RIGHTS COME WITH CORRESPONDING OBLIGATIONS THEY ARE NOT FREE STANDING

It would be wonderful if Pope Francis was taken seriously by more Catholics, especially the clergy, but he is not, he complicates the life of many in the clergy with complex thinking because he takes seriously the consistent teaching found throughout the entire Bible that God's dwelling is with his people.

Just a few weeks ago we heard that story of what many have come to call, The Last Judgment, when Jesus separates the sheep from the goats on the basis of what we did to the least of the siblings of Jesus.

Pope Francis begins with human experience, he understands the human sojourn to be unfolding, and the good pope tries to bring that unfolding into a conversation with the Catholic Tradition which is far broader and deeper than many in the clergy can understand.

I suspect that Pope Francis has read a lot of good fiction over the years, and I would bet a good deal of poetry, so he appreciates the various ways that human beings assemble their lives which are not generic, nor do human lives come with pre-printed instruction booklets.

Francis understands that human life can be a passionate undertaking, with great sadness, great joy, and many, many moments of love, filled with the workings of the Spirit in ways known only to the Divine Mystery.

Lots of people do not like mystery, uncertainty, and the unknown, but that is the nature of our evolving creation, driven, I believe, with Love that is never satisfied until we are fulfilled in Holy Communion with God in Christ.

Following are some of the ideas of Pope Francis taken from an article by Charles Taylor in the December issue of *Commonweal Magazine*:

Human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop and find fulfillment except "in the sincere gift of self to others" [*Gaudium et spes*, 24]. Nor can they fully know themselves apart from an encounter with other persons: "I

communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with others” [Gabriel Marcel, *Du refus à l’invocation*]. 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 bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships 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” [Angelus, November 10, 2019] (87).

In the depths of every heart, love creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves and towards others. Since we were made for love, in each one of us “a law of ekstasis” seems to operate: “the lover ‘goes outside’ the self to find a fuller existence in another” [Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*]. For this reason, “man always has to take up the challenge of moving beyond himself” [Karl Rahner, *Kleines Kirchenjahr: Ein Gang durch den Festkries*] (88).

The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives. Yet “today’s world is largely a deaf world.... At times, the frantic pace of the modern world prevents us from listening attentively to what another person is saying. Halfway through, we interrupt him and want to contradict what he has not even finished saying. We must not lose our ability to listen.” Saint Francis “heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that Saint Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many” [Quoted from the film *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word*] (48).

Our relationships, if healthy and authentic, open us to others who expand and enrich us. Nowadays, our noblest social instincts can easily be thwarted by self-centered chats that give the impression of being deep relationships. On the contrary, authentic and mature love and true friendship can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others. As couples or friends, we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace others. Closed groups and self-absorbed couples that define themselves in opposition to others tend to be expressions of selfishness and mere self-preservation (89).