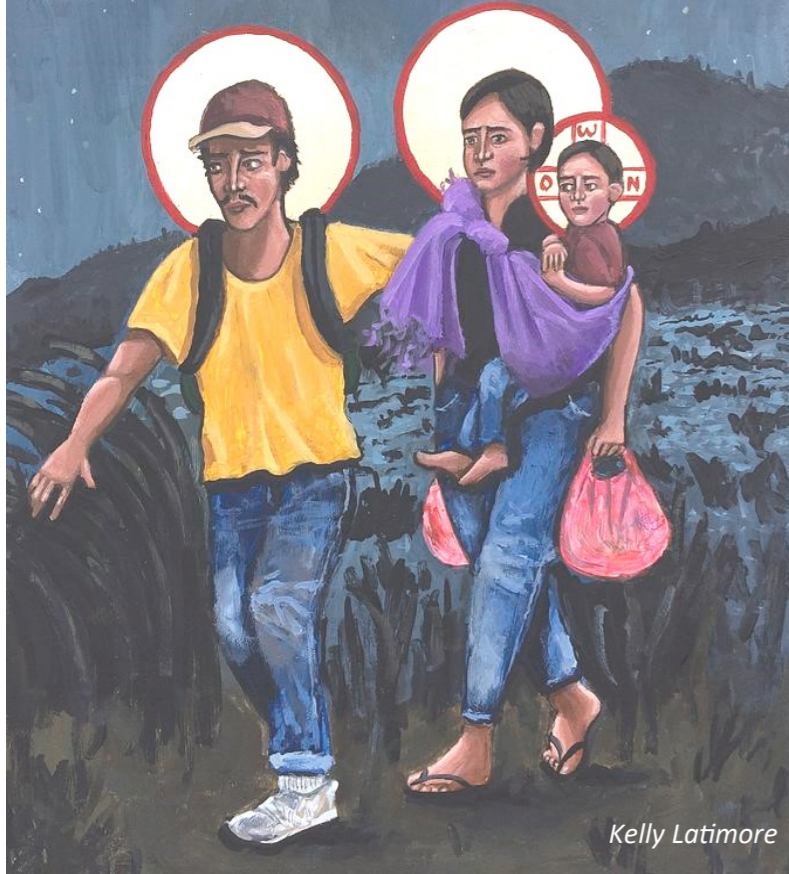


*Walking for Justice for  
Refugees on Palm Sunday*



Kelly Latimore

Refugees are not a number nor a problem but are persons, each of whom is precious, each of whom makes a claim on us as fellow human beings. In Australia some refugees have been accepted in Australia from refugee camps. Others are not recognised as refugees, despite fleeing from oppression and life threatening situations. Some are in detention centres; some have been transferred to hotel detention from off-shore detention for medical treatment; others live in the community, relying on charity for themselves and their families.

It was recently decided at short notice that it would be more economical to release some refugees from medical hotel detention into the community; they have no accommodation and are not eligible for any financial or medical assistance. They are fully reliant on charity.

As on the first Palm Sunday, some Catholics gather each year to walk with others through their city streets. They hold banners insisting that refugees are human beings like ourselves and demand respect. As they did on the first Palm Sunday and have done for many years, bystanders will stop to watch for a minute

or two and pass on, perhaps moved to reflection, perhaps dismissive of such puny challenges to a powerful State.

Yet, year by year the marches continue, gathering people who are still seeking protection, their relatives, people who are horrified at the callous treatment of our fellow human beings on Manus and Christmas Islands, in detention centres and in Australia, and the many Australians who weep that such things are being done in their name as citizens of Australia.

And the Christians who march continue to celebrate Palm Sunday, believing that Jesus' way to life lay through suffering, torture and death to the exuberant life in which we share. What began at the first Palm Sunday and continued in the brutality of Good Friday, has concluded on Easter Sunday with its victory over the forces of death dealing.

That is why we march together on Palm Sunday, praying that our fellow human beings will be freed from the living death imposed on them.

Adapted from an article written by Andrew Hamilton SJ for the *Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum*



**FROM FRATELLI TUTTI (37)**

*Certain populist political regimes, as well as certain liberal economic approaches, maintain that an influx of migrants is to be prevented at all costs ... One fails to realise that behind such statements, abstract and hard to support, great numbers of lives are at stake. Many migrants have fled from war, persecution and natural catastrophes. Others, rightly, "are seeking opportunities for themselves and their families. They dream of a better future and they want to create the conditions for achieving it."*

As Pope Francis explains it, solidarity is "a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion". As a virtue, it "means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity". Pope Francis speaks of it in terms of the common good, of opposition to the structures that dehumanise women and men, and commitment to care of Earth. Giving an example from ecological commitment, Pope Francis commends people who, although they "enjoy a surplus of water ... choose to conserve it for the sake of the greater human family". This "allows them to look beyond themselves and the group to which they belong". In the same way it is recognising "the rights of all people, even those born beyond our own borders".

The basis of solidarity is reaching beyond the self. Pope Francis calls this the "law of ekstasis" and says: "Let us realise that as our minds and hearts narrow, the less capable we become of understanding the world around us". Solidarity is what makes us human.

How can we achieve the virtue of solidarity? Throughout the *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis offers a number of "building blocks" toward solidarity. These are attitudes and practices which help us develop into people like the Good Samaritan. He reflects: "By his actions, the Good Samaritan showed that '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.'"

**DIGNITY OF EVERY PERSON**

The first building block is the recognition of the fundamental dignity of every human being, a recognition that anchors the whole structure of Catholic Social Teaching, and appears in many other places in Pope Francis's thought. When human dignity is respected, Francis writes, human beings begin creatively to perform "actions that further the common good."

**AFFIRMING HUMAN RIGHTS**

The second building block is affirming basic human rights, and in particular the rights of women. Pope Francis focuses on issues about which he has voiced his concern in previous years, namely human slavery and human trafficking.

**COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE**

Awareness of this vicious reality and working to do all we can to end slavery is intimately related to a third building block, the commitment to justice. "In today's world," Pope Francis laments, "the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia." The fact is, however, that we are all connected, we really "are all in the same boat".

**CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER**

A fourth building block is the development of a culture of encounter. Quoting from his message to the TED Conference in 2017, Francis exclaims: "How wonderful would it be, even as we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters who orbit around us". Later in the encyclical the practice comes up again. To develop a "culture of encounter" means being "passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This



becomes an aspiration and a style of life". "Building bridges", not a "culture of walls"!

**TRUST**

Fifth, there is the building block of trust, expressed negatively: not

fearing the other, especially the stranger, the migrant. Fear may be our natural instinct, Francis says, but — echoing his anthropology of ekstasis — "an individual and a people are only fruitful and productive if they are able to develop a creative openness to others." Our fears make us "intolerant, closed and perhaps even — without realising it — racist. In this way fear deprives us of the desire and ability to encounter the other".

**LISTENING AND DIALOGUE**

A sixth building block is developed in listening and dialogue. Through these practices we avoid what Francis calls "parallel monologues", prevalent on social media. Dialogue and listening "calls for perseverance; it entails moments of silence and suffering, yet it can patiently embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples". Authentic listening and dialogue are, in many ways, ascetical practices, and as for the Good Samaritan can lead us to seeing and paying attention to the strangers we meet on life's road.

**KINDNESS AND MEMORY**

There are other building blocks in *Fratelli Tutti* — inclusion, co-responsibility, "becoming a neighbour", effective catechesis and preaching — but two warrant special mention: kindness and memory. "Reconciliation and forgiveness are acts of solidarity, but we must always remember — the victims of the Holocaust, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of the slave trade, past and present. As Francis said in his message for the 2019 World Day of Peace, we must "keep alive the flame of collective conscience, bearing witness to succeeding generations to the horror of what happened".

Adapted from an article by Stephen Bevans