

SERMON KRIJTBURG SATURDAY, FEBR. 6TH 2021 Gregory Brenninkmeijer SJ

on Mark 1, 29 – 39.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I am convinced that we all agree that we are living in disturbing times. We feel threatened by many world-crises, that not only involve our health, but could eventually even threaten the existence of the entire human race. We are all too aware of the world-wide Covid-19 pandemic, but at the same time we have to face the coming climate change, the problems arising from big scale migration. The widening gap between rich and poor that can easily turn into a major threat to world peace.

More than most people Pope Francis, who has to lead a worldwide church, has been aware of this threat. In his many speeches, letters, talks, sermons and publications he unfailingly calls our attention to these problems. He underlines the urgency of these crises and points out that in this moment of time we have no time to waste. And he does not only use words. He does not shy away from daring actions.

Seeing that contacts between two of the greatest religious groups in our world, Christianity and Islam, have become utterly polarised and are all the time becoming more explosive, not only on the international level, but in many countries, cities, even neighbourhoods, he took action. In the first time in history the pope paid a visit to an Islamic state. On February 4th 2019 he visited the United Arab Emirates, where he met with the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayyeb. These two leaders at that meeting signed: 'The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.' To implement this document the 'Higher Committee on Human Fraternity' was established on the 20th of August 2019 and the next year, on the 3rd of October 2020 Pope Francis signed his Encyclical letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship: Fratelli Tutti. One immediate result of 'Fratelli Tutti' is, that on the 21st of December 2020 The General Assembly of the United Nations declared the 4th of February to be from now on the 'International Day of Human Fraternity'. Last week, on Thursday February 4th, this day, for the first time, was celebrated.

I will not blame you for not noticing this very important day. The daily news of the Corona Pandemic and of the restrictive measures imposed on us all, has taken pride of place. I have not found this day of 'Human Fraternity' highlighted in any of our papers, nor was it mentioned in the News. As if Human Fraternity were of minor importance. I hope that you understand, that with these words and actions Pope Francis follows the example of our Lord.

In today's gospel we can follow Jesus at work. On the previous Sunday we found him in the Synagogue of Capernaum, where He taught the people with great authority. And He proved his authority by liberating a man possessed by an unclean spirit, as it is written. And today we heard that, after leaving the synagogue, He cured Simon Peter's mother-in law from a fever. And later, after sunset, which signaled the end of the sabbath, He cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another and He also cast out many devils. It must have caused great joy in the city. Many people restored to health and many relationships freed of the strain of misunderstandings and split up's through differences of opinion. The people must have been thrilled by such a positive improvement of the atmosphere all around. They wanted Jesus to stay with them and protect them from returning into the snares of the devils. But Jesus wanted to go to all the towns in the country to everywhere create the kingdom of God.

The problem with these gospel stories is, that we tend to take them literally. But by doing that we make of them stories that amaze us and of Jesus a divine person to be admired, not followed. We simply cannot follow Him, we think, as most of us usually do not perform miraculous cures on a daily basis. These stories leave us perplexed, but do not sound like an invitation to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

Pope Francis reads them differently. He goes to do what Jesus was doing. He is building Kingdom of God by building a bridge between Christianity and Islam, and by urging all people to acknowledge each other as brothers and sisters. 'Fratelli Tutti' he cries; we are all brothers and sisters. We are all living on this planet as in our common home. He casts out the devil of discord and invites all of us to do likewise. He implores all the people of our world, whatever their background, culture or religion, to understand that all creatures of this world are interconnected, so that if one creature suffers all of us suffer. So Human Fraternity is not a distant ideal. It is a fact, and we are urged to strengthen this brotherhood by doing what Jesus did: Cast out every devil that creates division amongst ourselves; the devils who make the rich richer and the poor poorer. The devil who creates distrust between nations, but also distrust between leaders

and us citizens. The devils inspiring all the conspiracy theories and the devil who makes us believe that our prosperity is ours by right and that we justly defend that right by trying to keep others out. Let us do what unites and reject what divides. Each and everyone of us can help create kingdom of God by seeing each other, by trusting each other; by helping and promoting as much as we can our Human Fraternity.

We have come together to celebrate the Eucharist. 'Do this in Memory of me!' Jesus asked us. In memory of Jesus, our Lord, let us do everything that helps to promote peace and unity, Amen.