

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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THE HOST APOSTOLATE
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Blessings to everyone in the New Year... I hope that Christmas was a time of refreshment and joy for you. I hope that the new year brings peace. I also realise that for many people this season is one of struggle and loss, fear, and anxiety and for many a feeling of hopelessness. We live in times which are so unpredictable and often marked by war and a seeming endless time when natural disasters fill our news. There are other struggles too, finding the means to live in challenging economic times. One thing that we all value is feeling we belong both to someone and have one to share our joys and sorrow. We value being part of a family, however small, having relatives that we call rely on, or very good close friends. This of course is not true for many people these days, and we are only too aware of the tragedies of recent months where families have been wiped out, leaving maybe only one member. When such a tragedy befalls people look for another form of solace or identity all of which takes time and is of little comfort.

As Christians we belong to a very large family of believers. This should be a great consolation to us and while it cannot replace the sense of belonging to a natural biological family it can, in time, make us realise that this family is of great importance with all that it can offer to us... How many people have found that in times of crisis this family have been of assistance. Not always is this available however, because we fall short of extending our love and friendship to all people, but it is nevertheless something that we should treasure in our lives. The Gospel tells us plainly that what we do for each other is in fact being done to Jesus himself. By showing love and concern we not only embrace each other but we do the same to Jesus in thanksgiving for His care for us. We are required to 'Love God and love our neighbour,' it is not an optional extra to do both.

In nature we see reflected the great importance of belonging.

Animals in general, band together, sometimes against a common enemy, or to provide food or just to identify with each other. But can this belonging also become something that divides us and separates us from other people..?

We all belong to different national groups, different countries, with different customs. Within these we have different political outlooks, different styles of living and different aspirations. Our culture and style of living reflects what our attitudes are to belonging. In places of plenty there is a tendency to hold on to things rather than people, whereas in poorer countries and places, friendship and support becomes an imperative. These are generalisations of course but it does reflect on how we view belonging and why.

There is one essential problem about belonging and that is that it can become a barrier and exclusion zone to anyone who does not quite fit in to the way we express our belonging. Too often the sense of belonging becomes a means of exclusion to any one who does not fit in, who is different, who wishes to change things etc. This can become cruel and ostracising. In its extreme it sets nations against nations and leads to a desire to eliminate the problem, thus resulting in the death of many. This of course plays to our insecurities and fears. There are so many examples of this in our societies at the present time.

We are all entitled to be different and have different opinion and attitudes. With these there is always growth and development of ideas and ways of doing things. A secure family will allow its members to grow strong and maybe go a different path. This is not a case of right and wrong but of different paths to find that sense of belonging.

'If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other' St. Teresa of Kolkata

Of course, this leads to more strife and discord; it can be challenged, but always with a degree of understanding. One could ask therefore is it possible to have belonging without the effects of differences becoming a barrier to communication.

If we look at what Jesus did we may catch a glimpse of how to deal with old prejudices and conflicts. I always find it heartening when I look at how Jesus treated the Samaritans. These were Jewish people with a different outlook on belonging. He was well aware of the fact but it did not stop him relating to them and using them as positive examples. The Good Samaritan Story and 'the Woman at the Well' was horrific to the Apostles as she was not only a Samaritan, but female. This is not easy and to an extent at first, Jesus also emphasised his own grouping and allegiance. But as time went on He related to them as His own.

This I believe is at the core of the Christian message. We all belong to the family of Man. We all feel Joy and pain, we require food to live and shelter from the elements. We try to protect our children and work for the good of others.

We are in fact **all God's children**, one and all. It is this that should stop us engaging in killing each other, depriving each other of essentials to life, excluding each other from that which enhances, not diminishes our lives, health education and religious freedom. These are not pipe dreams but an essential understanding of who we are and what this means.

It has never been easy to find resolution to conflict. It is not easy to stand back and look at alternative ways of behaving that enhance belonging. It is not easy to accept that errors have been made and that leave deep wounds in people. It seems that even to stay neutral or express a unifying or understanding viewpoint is seen as cowardice and can also be a form of rejection or at least, dismissal.

As we start this new year of 2024 let us spend time and reflect on our rôle as Christians as Peace Makers. Let us learn to truly listen to each other with openness. Let us never be the means of excluding anyone even if we have to disagree with them or even if they reject us.

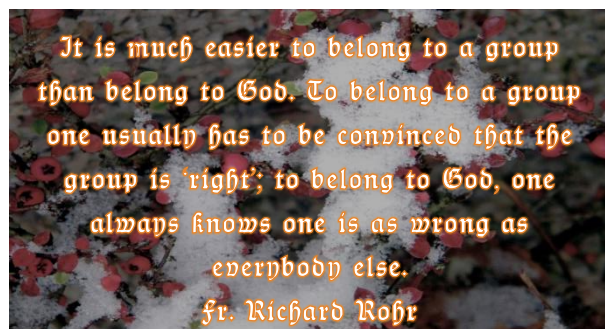
As St. Francis de Sales stated, 'you can achieve so much more with a spoonful of honey than any quantity of barrels of vinegar.' It is never going to be easy to unify but let us try with hope and courage.

Halina Holman ©

Pope Francis

"In today's world, 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."

October 13th 2020



Thank you everyone for the many donations in kind, rosaries, medals, Chalices, vestments, books and pictures and so much else not to mention funds to enable us to continue working. But we thank everyone for their prayers and support as well as encouragement. We have so many projects now that much is demanded of us. Always feel free to contact us with ideas or even contributions to Encouragement...We never cease to be amazed and thank God that it continues and goes out all over the world in His providence. H.H. Jan 2024

Feast Days in January

- 1st Mary, Mother of God, Theotokos
- 2nd St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen
- 3rd The Most Holy Name of Jesus
- 4th St. Elizabeth Ann Seaton
- 5th St. John Neumann (USA) St. Charles of Mt. Argos
- 6th /7th Sunday Epiphany: Holy Day of Obligation
- 8th The Baptism of the Lord
- 10th St. William
- 12th St. Aelred of Rievaulx
- 14th Second Sunday in Ord. Time
- 17th St. Anthony, Abbot
- 21st Third Sun. in Ord. Time, Sun. of the Word of God
- 22nd St. Vincent
- 24th St. Francis de Sales
- 25th The Conversion of St. Paul
- 26th Ss. Timothy & Titus
- 27th St. Angela Merici
- 28th Fourth Sunday in Ord. Time
- 30th St. Aidan
- 31st St. John Bosco

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