

NJPN Comment in the Catholic Universe: Fr Rob Esdaile Cacophony or Harmony: Which Future?

On Sunday we celebrate *All Saints* – a feast which many would regard as entirely ‘other-worldly’ in its focus. In contrast, this Tuesday Americans go to the polls after a particularly dirty and shouty presidential campaign, during which it is estimated a staggering \$11bn (the GDP of a small country!) was spent on campaigning. If Joe Biden wins, will he (as he promises) heal the deep divisions splitting his country? Alternatively, where will the world be after another four years of Trump’s aggressive rhetoric?

Of course, such depths of rancour are not the sole preserve of US politics. Our own *Brexit* debates weren’t all sweetness and light; and there are plenty of opportunists internationally who are willing to use falsehood to gain power. Pope Francis recognises this in his new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*: “*Today, in many countries, hyperbole, extremism and polarization have become political tools,*” silencing other voices by “*a strategy of ridicule, suspicion and relentless criticism.*” (n.15) The poison spills so easily across social media and into our heads and hearts. Our world seems far from the sublime harmony of the heavenly choirs!

Yet those very heavenly choirs could be just the sign of hope that we need. The doctrine of the ‘Communion of Saints’, which we celebrate on November 1, insists that within human history, notwithstanding all the forces that foment discord and distrust, there is a stronger unifying power at work; namely, the love revealed in Jesus Christ, a love that fosters harmony and healing. A capacity for communion is part of our DNA.

Fratelli Tutti can be read as a plea to develop a new style of relationships around the world. Pope Francis invites us to live the truth of the parable of the Prodigal Son with its two shocking discoveries: that the one we had been taught to despise was actually our neighbour all along and that ‘neighbour’ is something you choose to become by your actions.

We are not powerless prisoners of the rabble-rousers. A different future is possible – an open world in which all belong and all are led beyond their individual petty interests to build together a single global family of brothers and sisters (*Fratelli Tutti* indeed!), living sustainably on the earth. Yes, a different future is possible – but it’s up to us: how we debate; how we vote; what we post on *Facebook*; whether we call out falsehoods. Saints of God come to our aid: teach us, inspire us and intercede for us.

Fr Rob Esdaile is parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Thames Ditton