

A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

“A ‘culture of encounter’ ...requires us to place at the center of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys the highest dignity, and respect for the common good.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 232)

In the encounter of John the Baptist at the beginning of his ministry with the Pharisees and Levites, he was asked about his identity and reason for baptizing. His answer was forthright: “I am not the Messiah.” But he came as a witness to the Light, to point out to the One who was to come and who would attend to the needs of the sick and the dying, the sinner, the possessed, the outcasts of society.

The Lord of life, by his healing and personal care, would exemplify this respect for the dignity of every human person—especially those on the margins of society. He would proclaim the Beatitudes as the platform of his Kingdom that would reach out to the common good of everyone. The parable of the Good Samaritan would be his invitation for all of us to become neighbor to every one we encounter along the wayside or at home or in the wider community.

On our part, heeding John the Baptist, we can help make straight the way of the Lord — towards an open world that recognizes human rights without borders; that safeguards our common home, our planet earth; and that promotes encounter through dialogue among religious leaders as well as ordinary people. The spirit of Advent, a time of hopeful expectations, beckons us to work for forgiveness and reconciliation as central themes for a just and lasting peace in our society.

The birth of Emmanuel (“God with us”) brings to us the promise of peace on earth — as a gift and our task for the common good of all. No more wars, especially during this time of the Covid-19 pandemic that has highlighted our universal vulnerability. We are asked instead to adhere to Gospel Nonviolence as the way of Our Lord. May the sight of the Babe in the manger inspire our own vision of a fraternal society, overcoming a broken world with walls and artificial barriers. *Pax Christi!*

(+ Antonio J. Ledesma, SJ
Archbishop-Emeritus of Cagayan de Oro
Mindanao, Philippines)
12 November 2020