

The city of Verona looks forward to the Pope's visit. Tommasi (Mayor), "a city of dialogue and peace"

"Justice and Peace embrace" is the theme of the meeting at the Arena of Verona meeting on 18 May. What is the meaning of this theme for the mayor of Verona, **Damiano Tommasi**, and how is it put into effect by the city administration? "The purpose of the Arena of Peace," Tommasi replies in the latest issue of *Popoli e Missione*, "is to put justice and peace on an equal footing and in mutual dialogue. The theme of peace is deeply felt and it cannot be separated from that of justice. From the perspective of a city, it must be the goal of its administration: its local authorities must work towards closing gaps and differences, thereby offering equal opportunities to all. Only social justice can bring peace to a community, and I believe it must be a bottom-up process. Peace can only be stable if it is built on a foundation of justice. Unfortunately, not all of us share the same understanding of justice, and this often leads to conflict, which in fact prevents peaceful coexistence."



The Arena of Peace is indeed a splendid opportunity offered to us by the Holy Father with his visit. It is also a responsibility that the Pope is somehow entrusting to us, a responsibility of dialogue for this city, "crossroads of cultures and peoples", as he himself described it. I believe that Verona, by virtue of its history and experience, can take up this task. Let us remember the many people who set out from Verona to build dialogue and peace. For this reason, I see the "Arena 2024" meeting as a very important opportunity, and I hope that it will provide a confirmation, a seal of approval for our city as a platform for dialogue and encounter. Verona is a crossroads, not only for people, but also for goods, interests and cultures, and it is for this reason that we can and must take on the responsibility of bringing together the different cultures, the different perspectives, and fulfil this role. **You are an expert in "coming together as a team" and you never miss an opportunity to mention Don Barbiana forge peace?** Teamwork is about being aware that there is only one ball on the field - to keep the analogy going - because when the ball is shared, and there is only one, it is easier for everyone to work towards a common goal, one that must take precedence over individual interests. I believe that this is what the Barbiana experience was about: making young people aware of their uniqueness, developing critical thinking and giving them the tools they need to form part of a community working towards common goals. Sharing responsibility with the people who live there is, I believe, what every mayor, administrator or local authority wants for their city or town. In this way, it would be less complicated to carry the burden and less difficult to reach the goal.



This is one of the treasures of Verona! We have had the good fortune to witness the birth of extraordinary missionary experiences in our city, which have brought messages of peace and understanding to the world in the past and continue to do so today. It is this very richness that makes it possible for us to be attentive and credible voices on this issue. Our openness to the world clashes with a narrative of the city that, unfortunately, does not portray us fairly: The reality is that of the Arena, of the many movements, of the many volunteers who, day after day, are gaining credibility as messengers of peace. I believe that this should be a source of pride for us and, as interim administrators, it should also be a source of responsibility, because we must never lose sight of this identity. In fact, we should enhance these distinctive features of ours, for they do exist. They may not be well known, but I believe they represent the concrete reality of our city. For this reason, I believe that the Arena of Peace meeting, and I am happy to say this, is an event that is held in the right place and in the right city. **What are your wishes for the city and for Pope Francis with regard to the upcoming Arena of Peace?** My wish is that his presence will be an encouragement for our city to become more and more a city of dialogue and reflection, a city in which, day after day, a vision of peace is developed on an international level, a European vision of welcome. I hope that together, as a city, we will welcome him with all our energy and, above all, with our centuries-old experience of openness to the world. That is why I hope, as I have already said, that we will be able to engage in dialogue: it is important to bring together all our differences, because that is the only way to build peace, and at this moment in history we are in great need of it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9AszosoPJ4> *editorial staff, *Popoli e Missione*

Paolo Annechini*