
Social Week. Nerozzi (Secretary of the Committee): “Catholics can still make a significant contribution to the life of the country”

“Catholics are called to be the living parts of an open, universal community. This community inhabits a territory but breathes the life of the entire world. That’s why we firmly believe that Catholics have a great contribution to make to the life of the country, also in our own day.” **Sebastiano Nerozzi**, professor of the History of Economic Thought at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and secretary of the Scientific and Organising Committee of the Social Weeks of Catholics in Italy, is convinced of this as he outlines the contents and objectives of the 50th Social Week of Catholics in Italy to be held in Trieste from 3 to 7 July. **Professor, the meeting in Trieste is imminent. What atmosphere characterises the preparations for the meeting? Furthermore, what are your expectations for the days in Trieste?** As evidenced by the media, both traditional and social media, anticipation for the Social Week is mounting. This is also reflected in the questions we receive while visiting local territories and speaking with their inhabitants, including those who are distant from the Church, who want to learn more about the Trieste event. Furthermore, it is with interest that we await the unfolding of events in Trieste among the thousands of people who will be working together for five days, sharing their experiences and collectively formulating responses and proposals for the good of the country. This represents a novel approach, and is, in fact,

a significant social and participatory experiment of encounter and participation.

The dynamic began to emerge during the preparation phase and it is to be hoped that it will continue, following the Social Week, throughout the national territories. **What are the most important aspects that have emerged during the preparation process? On the basis of the experience gained during the preparation process, what is the peculiar feature of a Church, society and associations in Italy that are looking forward to the 50th Social Week?** It is a Church that increasingly learns to listen to others and to herself. The Synodal journey has set in motion processes of intense dialogue between individuals. And if these processes are taken seriously, they can bear lasting fruit for the life of the Church, starting from the local level. The preparatory process for the Social Week, which began in September 2023, was grafted onto the Synodal Way, involving the “construction sites in the streets and in the village”, as well as associations and self-organised groups. It was a kind of large-scale survey on the benefits and difficulties of participation, involving more than 200 groups and more than 2,000 people. The result is a short document entitled “Participation in Italy”, edited by Prof. Giovanni Grandi (a member of the Committee) and his team, which highlights some very interesting aspects of the dynamics of participation: for example today it is clear that those who engage in voluntary work or cultural or political activism are not only trying to do something concrete for the common good. They are also taking advantage of the potential for personal growth that it offers. It is important to experience humanly meaningful relationships, to give and receive trust, to cooperate and not merely to perform, to be part of a community where one is recognised and valued, where “counting is more important than counting oneself.” Therefore, it is important for group leaders to develop empathetic and shared leadership, which respects others, seeks to mediate rather than win conflicts, and encourages the responsibility and resourcefulness of all. These attitudes are essential today to encourage and nurture participation. **How will the Social Week unfold?** The Trieste Social Week is expected to attract a large number of participants. Around 1,100 delegates will be involved in more than 50 working groups in the “Participation Workshops” at the Conference Centre.

Discussions will focus on ways to strengthen networks of cooperation and on developing joint proposals for citizens and institutions.

18 "Democracy Squares" with around 80 speakers and experts on the main topics on the agenda: from energy to youth participation, Europe, health, schools, the relationship between local and national institutions and political education. Some 110 companies, associations, cooperatives and universities will set up their booths in the "Good Practice Villages" and exchange views in the 18 "Good Practice Dialogues", organised by theme. There will also be 12 round tables organised by national organisations such as ACLI, Union of Catholic Lawyers, Federcasse, Slow Food Italy, Confartigianato, Argomenti2000, ACCRI, Focsiv, Forum of Family Associations, Catholic Press Association, UCID, MEIC, ASVIS. **It is not just about reflections and debates. Right?** The Social Week aims to be an event for the people, open to all, where a variety of languages will facilitate a forum for dialogue and discussion, with the aim of encouraging commitment and reflection. The nights in Trieste will be enlivened by the Young Europeans Orchestra, made up of young musicians from all the EU countries, and by the students of the Trieste Music Conservatory with Zoè, a musical and visual performance; by musical events with artists of the calibre of Roberto Vecchioni, Riccardo Cocciante, Tiromancino, Simone Cristicchi, Amara, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Orchestra conducted by Maestro Leonardo De Amicis and hosted by Lorena Bianchetti; Paolo Logli's play about Raoul Follereau and Giovanni Scifoni's play about Saint Francis, " Superstar of the Middle Ages"; the testimony of Paul Bhatti, brother of Shahbaz Bhatti, Christian politician and Pakistani Minister for Minorities, assassinated in Islamabad on 2 March 2011. Thousands of people are expected to attend. The Web App, where people can register to attend, has already recorded sold out crowds for some of the events. **The opening ceremony in Trieste will be attended by President Mattarella and the closing ceremony by Pope Francis. What do you expect from their presence and what message will you convey to them?** Their presence emphasises the two great lungs between which the "heart of democracy" beats: the Constitution, with its fundamental values and its unwavering guarantees of freedom and dignity for all citizens and all people; the Magisterium of the Church, rooted in a millenary tradition, but always able to renew itself and open up positive perspectives to meet the challenges of our time. For many Italians (especially the younger generation), President Mattarella and Pope Francis represent guiding figures who can inspire hope and confidence, and who can also inspire guidance in the choices needed to be taken today for the good of the country. **The Social Week in Trieste will be the first Social Week for Catholics in Italy. Why this new designation?** It is simply the recognition of a de facto reality. Italy today does not only belong to Italians. Our cities, our neighbourhoods, our schools, our offices, our companies are populated by people who were not born in Italy or who, for many reasons, do not have Italian citizenship. Nevertheless, they work, they pay taxes and social security contributions, they grow up with our children, they share with us many challenges and many problems. This is an irreplaceable contribution, without which the country would already be bankrupt in economic, social and financial terms. Nevertheless, the many non-Italian citizens living in Italy often face a lack of full recognition, a condition that prevents them not only from fully exercising their rights and building a life for themselves, but also from making an effective contribution to the common good of all. Many of them are Catholics, but with all, regardless of their religious affiliation, we hope to open paths to a future of shared dignity and prosperity in Italy. **The theme of the 50th Social Week is "At the heart of democracy. Participation throughout history and into the future". The event in Trieste confirms the timeliness and topicality of this choice, as in previous editions, which have focused on the family, demographic trends, employment, the natural environment... The Italian ecclesial community continues to make a significant and shared contribution to the life of the country...** Catholics live in today's Italy. They are no different from others. But they are called to be bearers of hope. This hope comes from the experience of being a people who have been saved, who have received everything as a gift and who, in turn, wish to be a gift to others. Being Church alongside people with as many limitations and defects as ourselves teaches us to grow in acceptance and cooperation, to mediate the many conflicts and to rejoice in the miracle of a manifold unity, united and enriched by diversity. Catholics are called to be the living parts of an open, universal

community, inhabiting a territory but breathing the life of the whole world. For this reason, we believe that Catholics have a great contribution to make to the life of the country, also in our own day.

Alberto Baviera