
Cardinal Zuppi: “Build a country for all, centred on the human person”

(Trieste) "Catholics in Italy want to be the driving force in the construction of an inclusive democracy, where no one is excluded or left behind", said Cardinal **Matteo Zuppi**, Archbishop of Bologna and President of the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI), in his opening address at the Social Week in Trieste, in the presence of President Mattarella. Emphasising two words in particular - participation and solidarity - the Cardinal sketched out a portrait of Catholics in Italy as “a people” who “face with concern the threat of populisms which, by failing to remember the past, have the potential to undermine or weaken our democratic system.” “Participation, at the heart of our Constitution, allows and demands the human flourishing of individuals and society, it promotes a sense of belonging, it teaches us to have a heart that beats with others, amidst diversity”, said Cardinal Zuppi, who thanked the Head of State “for his service as guardian and protector of democracy and of the values of our Republic and of Europe”. He expressed the hope that, from a “border city” like Trieste, “we may build the future of a country for all, centred on the human person.” “From 1907 onwards, Italian Catholics didn't sit on the sidelines, they didn't withdraw to the sacristy, they thought and acted not for themselves but for the common good of the Italian people”, Zuppi said in his opening remarks, recalling the 50-year journey of the Social Weeks. “We don't want borders to be walls or, worse, trenches. We want them to be crossroads and bridges,” the Cardinal said: “We want this because it is the will of all those who have died along the borders. We want it for the sake of those who, at the price of terrible suffering, have become migrants and are asking to be treated and considered for who they are: human beings!”. **“Christians take their homeland seriously** and have even given their lives for it, but they also know that there is always a homeland in heaven and this makes us members of everyone's family and at home everywhere,” he said, echoing De Gasperi's words. “The Church is the mother of all”, repeated the President of the Italian Bishops' Conference. He emphasised that “to read and qualify the Church's positions from a political angle, to deform and downgrade her choices to the level of expediency or party politics, fails to communicate her vision, which always and only has the human person at its centre, without adjectives or limitations”. **“Today, a profound social and political renewal is needed”**, he said, citing John Paul II, and “lay Christians must therefore not abdicate their responsibility”, starting from the awareness that

“Peace and development have not been achieved once and for all,

but demand what Pope Francis describes as a “politics of love” in which “unity must be embraced as a goal to be pursued, defended and fostered.” “We will not be content with disengaged lamentations about the crisis of democracy and low voter turnout,” the CEI president insisted: “We are committed to positive, conscious, shared and achievable responses. So let us say NO to apathy and resignation:

“Our democracy can and must be better and more inclusive”.

“The Church does not claim privileges, she does not ask for them”, he clarified, referring to the contribution the Church can offer Italy “at this time in history.” “We see ourselves as belonging to a country that is going through difficult times, facing epochal crises,” said Card. Zuppi: “Just think of the demographic winter, the growing inequalities, the school drop-out rates, the growing abstentionism and disaffection with democratic participation, the discarded lives that become insignificant in the face of an omnipotence that turns into self-destructive nihilism. We face the challenge of welcoming migrants, of the green transition, of the loneliness suffered by many, of the difficulties in finding opportunities for young people, of the growing conflicts in social relations and between peoples, and finally of the war that towers over the international landscape and casts its shadow over everything”.

"Solidarity is with all, regardless of nationality.

In fact, everyone is our neighbour and participates in our future," he said, stressing the need to be attentive to the poor, the elderly, the weak, the disabled, " young people who feel they have no future but are in fact looking for one, women who are victims of male violence, people working in unacceptable conditions, housing, the absence of which prevents integration, family and future." He went on to comment on dramatic current events: "Satnam Singh was one of us: he dreamed of a future and was working to achieve it. The gangmaster system ("caporalato", i.e. the direct hiring of agricultural workers for very low wages, TN), the inhumanity, the exploitation of labour that disregards and humiliates the people who work in the fields", is completely alien to us. For the President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, solidarity "preserves and defends the life of all, the right to be born and the right to be treated and accompanied until the natural end, protected from pain and from any logic or calculation that hastens a person's death. Solidarity is an invisible but indispensable engine of all life in society. Its absence weakens the social fabric, hampers economic growth, insults the individual and fails to make the most of his or her abilities, and ultimately depletes democracy'. Today, Zuppi's denunciation: "Democracy is deteriorating because societies are becoming increasingly polarised, i.e. marked by increasingly bitter tensions between antagonistic groups, dominated by the friend-enemy dichotomy." Conversely, there can be no democracy "without an 'us'", without the protection of human dignity "in all those places where it is most seriously violated", because democracy "means countering the throwaway culture, addictions, the degrading prison conditions, preventing the many victims of psychiatric disorders." Democracy, as the theme of the Trieste Social Week states, is participation.

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