
Meeting for peace in the Mediterranean in Bari. Msgr. Raspanti (CEI Vice-President): "We wish to create a commonly shared model."

"Europe will never have permanent peace without peace in the Mediterranean." Cardinal **Gualtiero Bassetti**, Archbishop of Perugia-Città della Pieve, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, used this metaphor to describe the meeting of reflection and spirituality for peace in the Mediterranean, to be held in Bari from February 19th to 23rd - with the participation of the Holy Father, who will conclude the meeting on Sunday with the celebration of the Holy Mass, and bishops from three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. SIR interviewed Msgr. **Antonino Raspanti**, Bishop of Acireale, Vice-President of the Italian Bishops' Conference and coordinator of the Organizing Committee.



Immagine non disponibile

[Preparations are on track and organizational details are on schedule. We received a positive response from all invited guests, who have already booked with their delegates. There appears to be deep interest in the meeting, especially following the adverse events of the last few weeks. Logistical aspects are now in the process of being completed: accommodation, travel, arrangement of the venues for work and prayer. As far as the contents are concerned, we are currently preparing introductions to the themes and texts on which participants will be working on. There will be some further meetings to finalise the working method, with the facilitators and moderators of the discussion panels. The Church of Bari is designating locations and parishes that will be involved in the event.](#)

[Approximately eighty Italian bishops have registered to participate in the public events on Saturday afternoon and Sunday.](#)

How will the days in Bari be structured, and what is the atmosphere while waiting for Francis' arrival?

We launched the website, containing the program of the Days. The atmosphere is thus one of busy activity and, of course, also of curiosity and expectation, since it's the first such experience and nothing can be taken for granted.

The arrival of the Holy Father confers a very high value to this meeting, as we know Francis expects concrete and practical conclusions, as well as offering us enlightening guidelines for pastoral discernment and the contribution that will be given by our communities to the Countries in which they live.

The Pope expressed the wish to be present in Bari, at the concluding Mass.

The context of the Mediterranean, as Francis recently expressed also in Naples, is a theme that is very dear to him. As for the method, in his address to the Italian Bishops' assembly in May the Pope recommended synodality as a way of being of the whole People of God, with collegiality being a specific mode involving the exercise of the Episcopal ministry. In Bari, in harmony with the Holy Father's indications, we wish to create a shared model of thought, with a view to making our contribution to a number of problems requiring our attention, but also to give new impetus to evangelization, to the peace process, to the transmission of the faith, with all its difficulties. The message coming from Bari is intended to involve not only the ecclesial community, but society as a whole.

In Naples, Francis outlined a "theology of welcoming" which consists in initiating processes and adopting dialogue as a method. Is this the "theology of the Mediterranean"?

Dialogue is the key word. The most pressing need is to identify a dialogue method. In Naples the Pope spoke of theology, for service to the life of the Church. For Francis, the inspiration to practice theology, to conceive the faith and make it more relevant to the people of God, derives not only from adapting the theology or the doctrinal tradition of the Church that is preserved in form, but from experience, from the ability to come into contact with Christian life in the various contexts and territories. In this way theology can be explored, it can "create a network" with the concreteness of Christian life and thus interact with societal challenges.

The Mediterranean can be a theatre of war or a space for unity, a place where migrations are linked to the quest for personal dignity or, on the contrary, a place where human rights are trampled on or derided. A sea of death or a welcoming haven.

This is the first ambit involving theological reflection. There is great harmony between what the Pope in Naples called "theology in context" and the setting of our meeting: if it starts from grassroots level, from everyday life, theology can dig deeper to reflect on its mission, or else it will remain detached from society and from the practical life of the parishes. This does not mean that theology should become catechesis, but that it should be open to receive a great thrust from the concrete life of the people. The first imperative, then, as the Pope recommends, is to listen.

M.Michela Nicolais