
Paper bomb outside the parish church in Caivano. Fr Patriciello: "The Camorrists are enemies of the people, of society, of their own children"

A paper bomb exploded in front of the pedestrian gate of St Paul the Apostle parish church in the Parco Verde neighbourhood of Caivano, a city on the outskirts of Naples, on March 12, shortly before 4am. Father Maurizio Patriciello, the parish priest, has been on the front line in the fight against environmental degradation and pollution and against drug dealing and the Camorra organised crime syndicate. The priest's efforts have been praised by many – from the Church of Aversa to the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella. Father **Maurizio Patriciello** spoke about the latest incident with SIR. **Father Maurizio, what has been happening?** Organized crime groups are fighting each other, seeking to control the local area - and they will stop at nothing. There are frequent standoff situations: groups of six to eight motorbikes, each ridden by two black-clad young men who fire Kalashnikovs up in the air to intimidate opponents and convey the message: "From now on, we are the new bosses." Such internal dynamics are often unfamiliar to the general public. It goes unnoticed by people when the clans are not fighting, but as soon as strife is resumed, they attack and use bombs that don't cause much damage - as was the case in our parish - but make a lot of noise. They detonate them in the middle of the night to wake up and scare the entire neighbourhood. **Why was a paper bomb planted outside the church?** Over the past few months

the Northern Naples Committee for Liberation from the Camorra was created in my parish. The Committee's founding document was signed before our altar.

Signatories included Senator Sandro Ruotolo and Biagio Chiariello, chief of the municipal police in Arzano, a town facing a very difficult situation caused by the Camorra crime syndicate. Biagio Chiariello is a very honourable person and since he took office in Arzano he took action against malfeasance and organized crime. In response, on March 7, he received a death notice in his office bearing his name, his photograph and the day of his death, which was to be March 10. This threat was interpreted as a de facto death warrant. The Prefecture was alerted at once, and Chiariello was provided with a police escort - since his own life and that of his wife and son were in danger. Then, on March 11, it was my birthday. At 3.38am on March 12 a paper bomb exploded in front of the parish gate with a direct message: "Get out of our way, don't try messing with us." They want to be the ones in charge, it's obvious. **What are the objectives of the Northern Naples Committee for Liberation from the Camorra?** The name says it all.

First and foremost, our mission is to support people who are being intimidated.

For instance, we visited the coffee shop in Arzano where a few months ago a terrifying shootout killed a young man from Frattaminore, and wounded two of his friends who were in the coffee shop with him, as well as two innocent bystanders who were just having a coffee. Armando, the owner of the café, was traumatised, terrified. I have seen the images from the shooting: there was blood everywhere. The natural reaction is to shut everything down and leave. But that's what should not be done, because otherwise these villages would turn into ghettos controlled by the Camorra. During the following days, we members of the Committee visited Armando. I brought him a crucifix. A second objective is to encourage shopkeepers, who are subjected to intimidation, violence and crime, to press charges. Most of them are afraid. **You have received many expressions of sympathy following the bomb scare....** The General of the Italian Carabinieri and the Police Chief came to see me yesterday morning in the parish, the Prefect and the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, called to express their solidarity. I appreciate all of their sympathy, but last night I was alone in the

church with the faithful, who were a bit intimidated, fewer in number than on other occasions. Police officers came and noted that there are no surveillance cameras near the parish, although we have been asking for them for years. There is little the police can do. Given the dimensions of the municipality of Caivano, we are entitled to 64 policemen, but in fact there are 10, some of whom are nearing retirement, some have disabilities, others are on sick leave, which means very few of them patrol the streets. I am a priest and I welcome everyone: former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who was already in Naples, came to see me in the parish. I would like to thank him and all those who expressed solidarity with us. *However, two days have already passed since the bomb exploded and I wonder whether they will carry out another symbolic attack. Will they plant another bomb? Or will they come back, with more determination, to hurt me – since, in spite of myself, I have become a symbol?* **Father Maurizio, are you afraid?** It's a difficult question. If I said no, I would seem like a fool; if I said yes, I would seem a coward. Fear is part and parcel of our humanity. If someone is pointing a gun at you, your first reaction is to run for safety. However, if they intend to kill, the Camorrists will follow through. That is why I don't think that police escorts can be of much help. I am a parish priest, how could I live with a security guard? I visit people who ask for the anointing of the sick, I see the faithful who ask to be confessed. And then

when I stand at the altar in church celebrating Mass, saying the Lord's Prayer with my hands raised, I am the most vulnerable man in the world.

In that moment anyone could easily approach me and attack me, if that's their intention, causing a commotion in the church, among the faithful, the children. No one entering the church can be stopped by security, the church is open to everyone. Hurting a parish priest is the easiest thing in the world. If they intend to hurt me, they will find a way, with or without an escort. **What would you like to say to the Camorrists?** Yesterday I made an effort to send a message to them too, saying: *"What we are doing is aimed first of all at protecting your children, at saving them, because unfortunately you have not loved them. You are your children's greatest enemies. It pains me to say this, and it brings tears to my eyes, because you have forced them onto a dead-end street, a road with no turning back, which will inevitably lead either to the graveyard - and you will mourn them when they are very young - or to the prison of Poggioreale."* I have seen countless mothers weeping on the white coffins of their offspring, and I respect their tears, but, to be intellectually honest, it must be said that if these young criminals were themselves the children of Camorra mafia criminals, their parents have no right to mourn because it was their fault, it was their own doing, even if they were killed by the gun of a rival gang. We want to save the children of the Camorra, we want to save our people, we have a duty to spread the message of the Gospel.

The Gospel and the Mafia, the Gospel and the Camorra are two incompatible ingredients that will never mix; they will never combine into the same cake.

Pope Francis spelled it out, St John Paul II had said it before him: *The Mafia members, the Camorra, are excommunicated, they are the enemies of our community, of our children, of our society, of our people, of our economy, of our freedom, of our dignity. You cannot ask a human being, a Christian, a priest, to forsake his own flesh, his own DNA. The thirst for freedom, for truth, for dignity, for honesty, for legality, for normality, is enshrined in our DNA.* Of course, they may hurt us. But we can live with that.

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