
Italian Bishops: “Comforting today means being testimonies of hope for all”

"To be joyful witnesses of hope for all"; to be "proclaimers of opportunities" for the men and women of our time. "Explorers in search of untrodden paths, keeping a watchful gaze on the emerging newness." These are the recommendations of the Italian Bishops contained in the Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue's message that opens the booklet for the 24th Day dedicated to the deepening and development of dialogue between Catholics and Jews, celebrated on January 17. The text includes a message from the Italian rabbinical assembly; insights and suggestions for the celebration of the Word and prayer intentions. The section dedicated to proposals and tools to foster the knowledge of Judaism includes material on the National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah, Italian synagogues and klezmer music. **The passage from prophet Isaiah "Comfort, comfort My people" (Is 40:1), is this year's "inspiring theme."** "Our present season - the bishops write - marked by the much anticipated emergence from the pandemic that weakened the life of the country for a long time, including its faith communities, prompts us to deepen our reflection on our presence in society as believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." In this respect, the passage from Prophet Isaiah is a proclamation of comfort for the people, called to remain steadfast in their certainty that "their Lord will not abandon them." The booklet reads: "These years of pandemic, the tragedy of war, the energy, environmental and economic crisis, have exposed the cracks in social, economic and even religious organisations, revealing disturbing potential developments that are hard to comprehend. They exposed our weakness and confronted us with our inconstancy in responding to the Word of hope that God addresses to life." "Let us open our eyes!" is the bishops' invitation. "God works above and beyond our understanding, beyond our communities." "He acts beyond our narrow boundaries!." In its document, the Commission goes on to address the "brothers and sisters of the Jewish Communities in Italy", reaffirming its commitment to "build a future of hope together, bringing our service as Jews and Christians into society and cities. "And in doing so, we pledge to change our gaze: moving from one that is fearful, suspicious and weary, to one that is courageous, confident, vital, capable of seeing that God 'will not grow tired or weary'." **“The great challenge for our Christian communities - said Monsignor Derio Olivero, Bishop of Pinerolo, President of the Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the Italian Bishops' Conference** - at a time marked by numerous conflicts, is to be teachers of dialogue. There is a strong need for this. The Day is a great opportunity to put into practice this vocation that runs in our Christian DNA." Commenting on the theme chosen for this year's Day, the bishop said: "In our present times, comfort is mostly found in hope. The fact is that besides being wounded, we are also disappointed and afraid of the future. In my opinion, Christianity's mission today is to offer grounds for hope. It comforts those who look ahead and see a future unfolding for them. *A famous thinker once said that the lack of passion causes creases in the soul.* More than the pandemic, the crisis, the rising price of utility bills, I think that the absence of motivations to be passionate about life is what is causing the creases in the souls of so many people. Comforting means being aware of these wounds but also reviving the passion for life. It means saying that despite everything, being alive and doing something together is worthwhile."

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