
Card. Bassetti to the Permanent Council of the Italian Bishops' Conference - CEI: “Forging new paths together”

“Our contribution to recovery is expressed in a fundamental proclamation, rooted in the Crucified and Risen Christ, which remains the good news we have to offer to the Country.” Card. Gualtiero Bassetti, Archbishop of Perugia-Città della Pieve, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, delivered the opening remarks of the permanent Episcopal Council, ongoing in Rome until September 23rd. “It is with this gaze that we shall face the coming months”, Bassetti said, recalling the months leading up to the General Assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference, to be held from 16 to 19 November. “While the very image of a 'Field Hospital Church' hitherto reflected an evocative image, today it represents the reality that awaits and engages our response.” In the Cardinal's words, it encompasses the timeliness of one of Pope Francis' favourite assertions in the current scenario, governed by the pandemic.

“Far from being nostalgic, lamentable or withdrawn into implausible shortcuts, we feel the responsibility to embark on new paths where we can reshape the image of our ecclesial presence”,

the Cardinal pointed out: “It implies taking people, their dignity, the common home, creation, to heart; to care for and protect relationships, to cultivate and nurture the dynamism of communion, which thrives on encounter and genuine mutual sharing; to create a network of social alliances with determination and gratuitousness in order to promote together the common good of each and every one.” **“The renewal of our pastoral care calls for synodal breath and pace”**: as the Pope said to the bishops on May 22, 2017, “To walk together is the constitutive way of the Church.” “This season challenges us to foster a sense of belonging and co-responsibility, allowing time for the appreciation, attentiveness and esteem of the other person, resulting in concerted and determined shared choices.”

“Nothing will be as before”,

His Eminence said referring to the indelible images of these past months: “As Shepherds we recognize that we must rethink the experience of the faith, our own ministry and, more generally, the life of our communities”, was the appeal to the confreres. **The Cardinal praised “the remarkable number of Church properties made available” during the pandemic**, highlighting the “countless initiatives” brought forth by the ecclesial community during the Covid emergency through “gestures of solidarity” offered by dioceses, parishes, religious communities, priests and lay people, who “ministered to old and new needs” nationwide, “starting with people who were left without work, struggling with serious financial difficulties.” Embracing “those who, on a global level, even in this emergency, are forced to pay the highest price as a result of injustice and social inequality, to the point of being discriminated against in access to treatment, stripped of their dignity by the world's indifference.” “Indifference, complacency, and arrogance have contributed to an aggressive and predatory attitude towards the natural environment,” denounced the President of the CEI, according to whom “the foolishness that has seen us proceed undaunted, assuming that we would remain healthy in a sick world is now there for everyone to see”, as Pope Francis denounced. **For Cardinal Bassetti, on the pastoral level the current situation can be likened to that of the first Christian community gathered around the apostles**: “It is a community facing danger and that responds not by relying fully on new strategies or evaluations, but by gathering together in prayer. This unity, stronger than difficulties or any legitimate difference, makes us Church, the People of God.” “We were weakened by ordeals - the Cardinal argued - but rather by our tepidness and unfaithfulness, by

the spiritual worldliness that distances us from living a life of poverty and charity according to the Gospel, causing us to nourish ourselves instead of those entrusted to our care.” **The concluding remarks included some questions entrusted to the bishops:** "How can we propose a new encounter with the Gospel, how can we proclaim it with credible words and gestures? How can we help overcome resignations and clichés, and re-read this season of anguish and desolation from the perspective of the faith? What is the core nucleus for rethinking pathways of catechesis and maturation of the faith in our ecclesial communities? Which aspects deserve greater attention in the lifelong formation of our priests and which practices should be encouraged? Which steps lie ahead for us to enjoy greater Episcopal collegiality and ecclesial communion? How can we contribute to Italian society in order to remove the causes of poverty, promote the inclusion of the old and new poor and ensure that no one is excluded or left behind? Over and above all temptations to self-referential and defensive closure, how can we make the most of the interpersonal networks in which we are immersed and forge alliances between entities and institutions? Five years since the publication of the encyclical *Laudato si'*, which of its insights should we propose and which choices should we make in order to recover a sound relationship with ourselves, with others, with Creation and with God?"?

M.Michela Nicolais