

La Repubblica, April 10, 2013

The letter

In politics, too, the other is a good.

Dear Editor,

In trying to live Easter in the context of the most recent events in the Church, from Benedict XVI's resignation to the dramatic entrance of Pope Francis, I could not help but think about Italy's dramatic situation, and the difficulty of escaping from the paralysis that has been created.

Much has been written about this by people whose expertise in politics makes them far more qualified than I to speak. I have no strategic solution to suggest, but would like to offer a few thoughts in the attempt to collaborate for the good of a nation to which I feel a bond for many reasons.

It seems to me that the situation of deadlock is the result of the perception of the political adversary as an enemy whose influence must be neutralized or at least reduced to the minimum. The European history of the last century has given us sufficient documentation of analogous attempts by the various ideologies to eliminate each other, causing immense suffering to entire populations.

But the outcome of these efforts has led to a clear conclusion: it is impossible to reduce the other to zero. This evidence, together with the desire for peace that cannot be erased from the heart of each person, suggested the first steps of the miracle called a united Europe. What enabled the fathers of Europe to find the willingness to speak to each other, to build something together, even after the Second World War? The awareness of the impossibility of eliminating the adversary made them less presumptuous, less impermeable to dialogue, aware of their own need; they began to give space to the possibility that the others, in their diversity, could be perceived as a resource, a good.

Now, thinking of the present, I say that unless we accept the elementary experience that the other is a good and not an obstacle to the fullness of our 'I', in politics as well as in human and social relations, it will be difficult to emerge from the situation in which we find ourselves.

Acknowledging the other is the true victory for each of us. The first to be called to travel this road, as happened in the past, are precisely the Catholic politicians, whatever their party. But unfortunately, they too often seem more defined by party alignments than by self-awareness of their ecclesial experience and the desire for the common good. Yet precisely their experience of being "members of each other" (Saint Paul) should enable them to view the other as part of the definition of self and thus of a good.

These days many have watched the Church and been surprised at how she was willing to change, the better to respond to the challenges of the present. In the first place, we have seen a Pope who, at the apex of his power, made an absolutely unheard of gesture of freedom, amazing everyone, so that another man with more energy could guide the Church. Then we witnessed the arrival of Pope Francis, who from the first moment has surprised us with gestures of disarming simplicity that are capable of reaching each person's heart.

In recent years, the Church has been hit by not a few vicissitudes, beginning with the pedophilia scandal; she seemed disoriented and adrift, and yet even in facing these difficulties, her fascinating difference shone out.

How can the life of the Church contribute to facing the current situation in Italy? I do not believe it is by intervening in the political arena as one of the many competing parts and opinions. The contribution of the Church is much more radical. If the substance of those who serve this great work that is politics lies only in politics, there is not much to hope for. Lacking any other sure foundation, they will necessarily grasp at politics and personal power and, in the case in question, will see conflict as the only chance for survival. But politics is not sufficient unto itself. This has never been as clear as it is today.

In her poverty of a reality full of limits, the Church continues to offer people, precisely in these days, the one true contribution, the one for which she exists, and Pope Francis reminds us of it continually: the annunciation of the Risen Christ. He is the only one who fully answers the expectations of the human heart, to the point of making a Pope free enough to resign for the good of his people.

Without a real experience of positivity, able to embrace everyone, it is not possible to start anew. This is the testimony that all Christians are called to give, beginning with those engaged in politics, together with every person of good will, as their contribution to unblock the situation: the affirmation of the value of the other and the common good above all other interests of party.

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