

2017 Local Elections

Reasons for a commitment to the good of all

All of us are called to attention by the local elections that will take place in Italy on June 11, not only those who are already involved in the various levels of the political realm or those who are running for office.

Society, both at the individual and organizational level, seems to be dominated by a pessimism fed by continued uncertainty. We see so many problems: growing poverty rates; the absence of reliable structures within civil society and of proposals capable of making a difference in the realities people are facing, from supporting their family to finding a job; the apparently unstoppable influx of migrants, which contributes to the rising sense of insecurity; the marginalization of the elderly and lack of housing for the less advantaged and for young married couples; the educational crisis and school facilities in disrepair; the lack of sufficient parks and athletic facilities; pollution and lack of public green space; transportation issues... These are just a few of the questions we have to face every day, whether we want to or not. They are part of the fabric of our daily life. On top of all of this, there is the uncertainty resulting from the lack of trust and of confidence in our institutions.

In such a landscape, we risk being overcome by indifference or by an instinctive reaction – a “non-judgment” or the idea of “taking down” those in power, holding them responsible for everything that’s wrong. A growing culture of distrust and uncertainty impedes any proposal for change and tears down anything that has flowered from one’s belonging to an ideal, to a history or tradition, of any color or creed. What’s needed most urgently today are actors who can – in small things and great – come together, dialogue with each other and offer credible proposals.

How can we begin again?

▪**1**▪ The first guideline is to put the insatiable **desire for good** that’s rooted in the hearts of all people back at the center.

When facing a need – in our family, at work, in any relationship – we are by nature pushed to roll up our sleeves to offer a helping hand. Our impetus to contribute something that marks the beginning of a solution to a problem is more basic and comes before complaining about how other people have fallen short. Consequently, the place we need to risk our energies today, even if it seems as far as can be from the most apparently urgent problems, is in considering the needs that we see right where we are living.

▪**2**▪ This way of taking seriously reality and the urgent needs it presents feeds into the commitment to the **common good** or the **good of all**, which Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, identifies as a challenge for us accept. It’s not an abstract slogan; it’s an experience to live, a hypothesis to verify. “The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favors a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. (...) we Christians remain steadfast in our intention to respect others, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and to ‘bear one another’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2)” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 67).

▪**3**▪ This means coming together to build those **intermediary organizations** that, since the unification of Italy, through the worker movement and Catholic initiatives, have improved the lives of many people. These were inserted into the Constitution of 1948 and again in the revision that took place in 2001 (the principle of subsidiarity).

There are so many **non-profits** and initiatives created by these intermediary groups, both old and new: those serving the poor, including the Food Bank and *Caritas*; tutoring programs for disadvantaged youth, such as Portofranco and the organizations working in the Zen neighborhood in Palermo and the Scampia neighborhood in Naples; welcome centers for immigrants like the Casa della Carità and the Arca in Milan; support networks for those with high-risk jobs like FeLSA CISL; palliative care centers including Fondazione Floriani; professional training and development institutes like Turin's Piazza dei Mestieri; and preschools all over Italy.

The first responsibility for one's neighbor and for the common good, no matter where you fall in terms of ideals, is to continue to build grassroots responses to needs, overcoming the temptations to seek personal benefit or grasp at any opportunity to gain power.

These non-profits cannot and should not try to replace **public services**: they cannot reach everyone and their primary value is as a witness that calls everyone to their own commitment to make a difference. On the other hand, the proposal of overreaching administrations that think they can respond to the needs of citizens and of the common good on their own is completely out of place; they marginalize and ignore these civil society initiatives. Besides that, there are no longer enough resources to reach everyone, resulting in a reduction of aid to citizens to a bare minimum. The time for **public-private partnerships** has come, as most distinguished scholars have affirmed. Overcoming the temptation to do everything themselves or to only promote organizations to whom they have close ties, public administrators need to collaborate with citizens and the organizations they form in real, concrete ways, not treating them merely as passive end-users of public services.

▪**4**▪ This is the level at which to consider the role of **politics** in the upcoming elections. What's needed to respond to the challenges of the day are not "artificial" parties imposed from above, or reactive "no" parties, but rather individuals deeply rooted in a real, not virtual, people who bring the political interests and ideals of the people into the arena, continuing the conversation with the broader society and other political actors, and always putting the common good first.

Consequently, none of us – individuals, associations or movements, politicians or parties – can remain indifferent to the call recently given by Pope Francis:

"Get involved in politics, but, please, in real politics with a capital 'P'! – including through a passion for education and engagement in cultural dialogue (...) to encounter all, welcome all, listen to all and to embrace all" (Francis to the Italian Catholic Action group, April 30, 2017).

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