

## **The pictorial exhibition “Gratia plena”: in the smell of blasphemy the diocese of Carpi**

On March 2, the controversial pictorial exhibition of the local artist, Andrea Saltini, which retraces some episodes from the life of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, was inaugurated in the Church of Sant'Ignazio of the Diocesan Museum of Carpi. The event represents a tribute to Pope Francis' invitation to deepen the dialogue between the Church and contemporary art, but the almost immediate reactions of the numerous citizens who attended the event have raised heavy controversies against the Diocese which have, even, led to the filing of a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office of Modena, against Archbishop Erio Castellucci, and his collaborators, to whom the faithful contest pursuant to art. 403 cp. the crime of contempt of the Catholic religion. The artistic interpretation of the Gospel story is perceived by the faithful as irreverent and offensive to religious sensitivity. What triggered the protests was, in particular, a painting, placed in front of the main altar where relics of saints are kept, entitled "INRI-San Longino", depicting the deposition of Christ, in the painting the particular position of the male figure bent over body of Christ is contested because it is erotically allusive. Discontent spreads along with requests for intervention addressed to the bishop. But the response of the Diocese seems to sharpen the tone of the protest, rather than tone it down, as the Vicar General of the diocese, Monsignor Ermenegildo Manicardi, acts in support of the artistic initiative, curated by Don Carlo Bellini, issuing a statement in which he inserts the experiment of dialogue between the Diocese and the artist Saltini, who is also an atheist and therefore certainly not animated by religiously qualifiable feelings, at least in a positive way, within the synodal path to which the entire Catholic community is called, including, in this. In the same statement, the Vicar accuses the faithful of harboring unfounded and counterproductive prejudices for the purposes of the synod cause itself, which risk compromising the Church's dialogue with the contemporary world, a dialogue between spirituality and art, much desired by the current pontiff himself. Once the protests of the faithful went unheeded, also

expressed through the organization of acts of remedial worship, such as prayer sit-ins and vigils in front of the Church deemed "profaned", the faithful formally established a committee called "*Quanta cura*" which gave assignment to a lawyer to contact the Modena Prosecutor with a formal complaint, and also a request for a precautionary measure to stop the repetition of the alleged crime. The issue highlights two critical aspects, which can only be mentioned here. The first concerns the internal relationships between the faithful and their legitimate pastors. In essence, the faithful complain about an authoritative attitude of the bishop and his collaborators which does not take into account the legitimate claim of their *sensus fidei*, which they believe lies in the tradition of the essential beliefs of the Catholic Church as specified by *Lumen gentium* n. 12, Code of 1983 can. 212 § 3 and Catechism n. 907

It should be remembered, however, that this *sensus fidei* is not a mere ecclesial public opinion "and invoking it to contest the teachings of the Magisterium would be unthinkable, since (...) it cannot develop authentically in believers, except to the extent that they participate fully in the life of the Church, and this requires responsible adherence to the Magisterium, to the deposit of faith" (Benedict XVI, Friday, 7 December 2012, Speech to the International Theological Commission). In this matter, faithful and high prelates accuse each other of undermining, with their respective attitudes, the indefectible principle of ecclesial communion. The second issue is, in fact, that the faithful offended in their religious feelings by the exhibition considered blasphemous and by the ommissive attitude of the Curia regarding their complaints, even mocked and accused of bigotry and of compromising communion itself and the synodal path, seem to prefer the *via appeal* to the state criminal judge. The complaint filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office is the path taken without having experienced all the protection tools offered by the canonical system, to which canon generically refers. 221 of the code, with the aim of "*compellere partes ad concordiam*", in the case of disputes between the people and the hierarchical authority. In the hypothesis in which the faithful could detect an arbitrary use of potestas (can. 1389 CIC) and want to defend not so much the juridical good of an individual but

that of the entire ecclesial community, especially when it is believed to be in danger "*ratione peccati*". In this circumstance, for example, the idea of scandalum being invoked by the faithful (2284-2287 CCC) would fall within the scope of operation of canonical criminal law and a responsibility ex can. could be assumed on the part of the bishop. 1326 § 2 paragraph for the commission of the crimes foreseen by canons 1368 and 1369 by abusing one's authority. But leaving the hypothesis of delictum as extremely residual, moreover not formulated by the faithful, they could have continued to exercise the right of petition ex can 212 CIC, perhaps by appealing to the higher ecclesiastical authority, thus avoiding risky jurisdictional drifts. The issue is certainly delicate and the outcry caused will require a new intervention from the ecclesiastical authority which serves to heal the apparent vulnerability to ecclesial communion. In any case, in this controversial circumstance, in which the effects produced by an artistic work of religious content, but in the sense of personal interpretation, but not classifiable as officially sacred, are being discussed, Paul VI's warning to artists seems to resonate strongly, in December 1965, when calling them "guardians of beauty in the world" he urged them to free themselves "from the search for extravagant or unhealthy expressions".

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