

DIOCESE OF VICENZA

Scandal in Italy: bishop approves hamburger party in church

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The poster speaks for itself: a big juicy hamburger in the foreground. The title does the rest and reads: 'The burger where you wouldn't expect'. In fact, it is clear how things will go by the proposed location: a church. The church of San Pietro di Trissino, in the

diocese of Vicenza, Italy. A hamburger shop in a church, with the usual banal excuse of being an attractive proposition to captivate young people.

The wacky idea came from the Youth Pastoral of the Castelgomberto and Trissinopastoral Unit, on the occasion of the commemoration of St. John Bosco, considered the saint of youth, but also someone who, if he had happened on an initiative such as this in his time, would have surely beaten the unfortunate patrons to a pulp (holy), horrified by such a profanity. Just as some of the parishioners were justifiably horrified and who immediately took pen to paper and immediately wrote to the Bishop of Vicenza, Giuliano Brugnotto, whose response, as we shall see, is mind-boggling.

In the meantime, the diocese Pastoral Office has replied to the faithful with an explanation: "On the occasion of the feast of St John Bosco, we thought a proposal that involves the youth in a place that many of them do not usually visit, with the intention of spreading the message that the church building is a place for everyone, a place of welcome, of meeting, of relationships, of sharing, of celebration. At the top of the church (main entrance) a large table will be prepared inside the church where we will eat together while listening to music".

In short, the church is to be used as a restaurant. Nothing new, it could be said - a carbon copy of the Community of Sant'Egidio - but combined with something decidedly out of any canon: a sandwich bar exclusively for young people who, as we know, do not go to McDonalds to listen to evangelical announcements of any sort, because the only announcement they want to hear is that the crispy McBacon for table 15 is ready.

Of course, the parish priest has given his blessing to the initiative, not least because he is no stranger to rather deplorable episodes against the proper attitude for Mass and the use of the Lord's house. He famously [entered the church on a bicycle](#), which his superior apparently never took back.

Bishops come and go, but not the problems they create. For the Bishop of Vicenza, Monsignor Giuliano Brugnotto, who was questioned after the controversy surrounding the initiative, stated Jesus himself would give the go-ahead for hamburgers in church because he had been "labelled a glutton and a drunkard". Answering a journalist's question on the sidelines of a press conference, Monsignor Brugnotto said verbatim: "I understand that a certain reaction by those who think that by definition the sacred should not be touched can be expected," he said. "Referring to the words of the Gospel, from an ecclesial point of view, I think it is important to involve and to be attentive to

everyone, and among these are not excluded young people, on the contrary, one of the categories that are certainly part of today's fragility, so I think it is right to give them space, with due attention, even in sacred places. Jesus was called a glutton and a drunkard, but if he were here today, I believe he would welcome and approve such initiatives".

This answer is disturbing, not only because Brugnotto has in fact endorsed what is strictly forbidden by Canon law, that is, a meal in a place of worship, but also because, to justify his consent, he stigmatises Jesus Christ, as if he were an oracle to whom one could turn for an answer to a burning question.

The problem does not lie with those who think that "the sacred should not be touched", because it is the Church itself that says so, and certainly not the poor faithful who are now thinking of some other form of protest action to make their voices heard. Even Jesus would rather eat at McDonald's than in his own home.

And here the matter becomes complicated because the Church has never admitted that in order to attract young people to the Church (a questionable term for a proposal of faith, but this is the objective promoted by the parish organisers) one should attract them by going to those places which by their very definition are destined for worship, as if a parish were not sufficiently equipped with halls and spaces in which to carry out any kind of eating activity, which the Church has never despised as a place of sharing and communion. Here the intention seems to be to undermine the nature of the Church as a place of worship in order to give us a multifunctional and multipurpose building, good for all human activities, because prayer should not take precedence over everything. Yet, Canon 1210 is very clear on this point: "In the sacred place, only that which serves the exercise and promotion of worship, piety and religion is permitted, and that which is alien to the sacredness of the place is forbidden".

Therefore, what will take place on 31 January will be an authentic profanation, even if the Bishop would gladly refer to the next sentence, which reads "In an individual case, however, the ordinary can permit other uses which are not contrary to the holiness of the place". Now, to clarify, by can permit other uses" it is meant by an act that is valid only for that situation, but it is a matter of a circumstance, precisely, of an extraordinary and necessary one. In fact, it is 'as long as they are not contrary to the sanctity of the place', which does not mean as long as they are not sinful acts, but refers only to their use for worship.

In fact, to give an example, one only has to read carefully what the Italian Bishops'

Conference wrote in 1989 to regulate concerts of sacred music in churches to understand how prudence, necessity and respect for the place must be the fundamental criteria for discernment. Not exactly what a hamburger dinner represents (on a Friday, but let's not quibble), where, according to the manifesto, there will be music and entertainment.

Especially since, to play the Bishop's game, the truth is that the only time Jesus told us not to occupy a church, he did it once and for all by overturning the tables of the moneychangers and pigeon sellers, and it didn't end well for them when he called the holy temple 'my house, a house of prayer for all peoples' and not a temporary fast food for lack of imagination.

As far as the proposal for the youth is concerned, it is worth recalling what Cardinal Robert Sarah said last Monday, [host of the Daily Compass](#), who, wanting to get to the root of today's crisis of faith and evangelisation, pointed his finger at the lack of worship: "The loss of the religious value of kneeling and the sense of adoring God," he said, "is the source of all the fires and crises that are shaking the world and the Church, of the restlessness and dissatisfaction that we see in our society. We need believers! The world is dying for lack of worshippers! The Church is parched for lack of worshippers".