

*"Charity, like love, manifests itself more in silence than in words. Silence is more costly but says so much more"*

This admonishment, so un-Italian for a great Italian, should prompt me to stop talking, immediately, to tune in to the silence that in a few minutes will fall over all Italian airports, so that we can feel ourselves united with you in remembrance of the victims of Linate. Everyone, Civil Aviation Authority representatives and passengers, people of the air and people of the ground, of the Air Force and government, those who fly and those who let us fly, those who wait: a virtual bridge between sky and earth, all united in an embrace of caring, participation, pain, affection, acknowledgement and gratitude for you.

It would be an absurd pretension to add or superimpose human words - so inevitably poor and empty - on the triple invocation of the prayers that we have just heard in this small Church of Fiumicino, prayers that recalled the true and deepest value of memory and intercession. Three different voices, yet speaking as one.

I do not wish to disturb the atmosphere of this ceremony, so intimate and touching; nor do I wish to break the spell of this silence, at once painful and comforting.

Only poetry can express the same feeling faced with so much tragedy. The editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, Ferruccio De Bortoli, expressed it so well in

evocative words that underscored **the active duty of remembrance and the responsibility to remember and to act**. This is why I have also broken the silence that I would have willingly imposed on myself, to take up that invitation and reaffirm that call. It is a call to solidarity, caring and affection, but at the same time it is a call to serious and effective action. It is the same feeling that the Prime Minister expressed to you in his message to ENAC, the Italian civil aviation authority, and in which he wished to include all of you, both those who were able to participate in this ceremony and those who remained at home, with the same pain, in many parts of Europe.

As I said, it is a message of acknowledgement, caring, participation and sharing of the pain, from which emerges a sincere and heartfelt "Thank you!" for what the Committee has accomplished. Because your trial, a tragedy that no one should have to experience, has taught a great lesson. The teaching of the Committee of 8 October is a great lesson in civil action for which, in the name of the Government, I thank you, dear Pettinaroli, and through you all of the relatives and families of the victims of Linate.

*"The eyes held no more tears, but bore the signs of having shed many. There was in that pain a certain calm and depth that bore witness to a wise and strong soul ..."*

I could borrow the words of Manzoni to describe your feelings today. But I should do much more to communicate and testify to your commitment, to teach

our fellow citizens and the entire country the great lesson born of your efforts. You have placed your pain at the service of others. You have not stopped at demanding truth and justice, as so many have rightly done before. No, you have gone beyond that. You have sublimated the pain to transform it into a stimulus and commitment. You have given memory and pain a positive value by transforming it into action, so that it can in turn guide the action of men.

You have been sensitive and faithful to that eternal principle of the human condition, which an Italian philosopher of the last century described as follows: *"Legitimate is the need that arises in the course of our learning to fix in our minds the known, or that which we most want to remember, in a form that makes it most readily memorable and present to the spirit, just as for the necessity of action, in support of further enquiry and new understanding."* Remembering in order to act; not forgetting in order to commit ourselves, and commit ourselves to ensuring that this should not - cannot - ever happen again.

De Bortoli is right: no court trial or compensation can even begin to repair or heal the wound that you bear in your hearts. But what the Committee has accomplished, what you have accomplished, will serve to ensure that no one will have to experience the horrible suffering that you have felt and continue to feel. For this, too, we are in your debt, and for this our participation is strong, sincere and caring.

You have worked a "miracle", and you did so immediately. Under your impulse, behind the urging of Pettinaroli and the Committee in the very aftermath of the tragedy, when tears mixed with bitter accusations - as was natural and just - you sought to transform the pain and despair into a orderly, patient, careful and insistent effort to reconstruct the events, to ascertain responsibility, and not only. You have succeeded, miraculously, to project your efforts even further, towards a goal that goes beyond yourselves to encompass others, to reduce the risks for everyone, to enhance safety in airports, the safety of those who fly, the safety of travellers.

Pettinaroli rightly acknowledges the work of ENAC, a gesture that I second, certain that I am not trampling your feelings. ENAC was the first to understand, although the others, the Government and local authorities, also came to understand, the meaning of the lesson that your great civic commitment imparted, borne along by your passion and suffering, certainly, but also by action and initiative. And, as ENAC's directors have said, this marked a turning point in the agency's action. Since that moment, nothing has been the same and nothing will remain the same.

De Bortoli also posed a grave question: what are you doing? We are doing everything to absorb the message that you have sent in such pain so as not to waste the value of such a supreme sacrifice. We are doing what is humanly possible to prevent the recurrence of such a disaster: people, resources, organisation, equipment, activities: everything has changed since that 8

October. Your pain has brought life to many others. And this is the meaning of the ceremony we witnessed just now. His Excellency Monsignor Reali, Bishop of Fiumicino, understood this perfectly when he said that "life rises out of death". And all of us, together, have seen just how true this is: during those moments in the Church, while the prayers rose to accompany the music, we heard the myriad voices of children speaking in many languages: life continues.

Your achievement, the achievement of the Committee, has been your success in giving meaning to your sacrifice, stimulus and effort to your pain, civil commitment to your memories. And I want to repeat this, to refute the poet who said *"The memory of happiness is not happiness. The memory of pain is still pain"*. You have transformed pain and memory together into a gift, a wonderful gift for those who will come after you. It is a gift that you have offered with suffering and generosity, and for this we are grateful to you. For this Italy says:  
Thank you!

Gianni Letta  
Under-secretary of State  
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