

Village Policies & Happiness

Person, family and common good

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There is no time for indifference, as Pope Francis pointed out to us powerfully in his Easter message, and in the face of the devastating effects of the pandemic. The whole world is suffering and must find itself united in facing its economic, social and human consequences. Those who have political responsibilities should actively work for the common good, providing everyone all the means and tools necessary to lead a dignified life.

The challenge we are facing unites us all and makes no difference to people. Do not miss the opportunity to give further proof of solidarity, even by resorting to innovative solutions. Indifference, selfishness, division, forgetfulness are not the words we want to hear at this time. (Easter message of Pope Francis, 12.04.2020).

But what is the common good?

By common good is meant "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (*Gaudium et Spes* 26). It therefore does not consist in the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject: the common good belongs to each and every one, it is common, as such indivisible and only together is it possible to reach it, increase it and keep it. Its logic is that of a system, we must all pursue it: individuals, families, businesses and the state. It implies the search for the meaning and the good of existing forms of social life to guarantee everyone an equitable distribution of goods. It is necessary as an expression of the dignity of the person in the social dimension, since no one can find fulfillment only in oneself, regardless of his or her being with and for others. But the common good is not an end in itself, since it serves to achieve the ultimate ends of the person, so that each one can be completely fulfilled. It therefore cannot be reduced to a *simple socio-economic well-being*.

How is the family an institution necessary and essential to the achievement of the common good?

The family, which is born from the intimate communion of life and conjugal love founded on the marriage between a man and a woman, has its own specific and original social dimension, as the primary place of interpersonal relationships, the first and vital cell of society (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 11). It is "the primary place of the 'humanization' of the person and of society" and "the cradle of life and love".

The family, therefore, is central in reference to the person. In it a living environment is created in which the child can "develop his potential, become aware of his dignity and prepare to face his unique and unrepeatable destiny". In this sense, the first and fundamental structure in favor of a healthy development of the "human ecology" is the family. (*Centesimus Annus* 39). It has a public dimension, which generates obligations for its members, which are not limited by the terms of a contract, but which derive from the very *essence* of the family, founded on an irrevocable marital pact and

structured by the relationships and roles that derive from the generation or adoption of children. The conjugal family, with the stability and certainty that it confers to its members, requires for these reasons to be strongly supported by the State, as an INSTITUTUM, which is the foundation of society, a condition which establishes every other possibility of development for the human person.

The link between family, common good and economic life is very strong: economy derives from *oikia-nomos*, the art of managing the family, the home, in a macro-economic sense, our common home (*Laudato Si'* 13). For the bonds that characterize it, the family is able to generate good moral attitudes within the market, such as sharing and solidarity between generations, making itself a producer of services. The family generates human resources, circulates capital starting from specific needs, and produces services. It is a *driving force* in the economic system. And the pandemic experience has demonstrated this. Family has been the shock-absorber that absorbed on his shoulders the heaviest human and economic consequences of the crisis.

The principle, now dominant, of the maximization of profits, reflects a misunderstanding of the economy and does not lead either to the happiness of individuals or to the common good (*Laudato Si'* 195), just as it does not guarantee integral human development and social inclusion (*Laudato Si'* 109).

In fact, the capitalist economy seems to have reached a saturation point, not in terms of economic growth or GDP, but in terms of increasing happiness and, therefore, in terms of the common good. In addition, very little is destined for those who have remained behind so far: the poor, the marginalized, those who have been in difficulty for too long. The empirical evidence suggests that if we use an increase in our income simply to buy bigger houses, we are not happier than before. But if we use the increase in income to acquire *inconspicuous goods* to dedicate more time to those we love, things change.

One of the macro-conclusions of *Easterlin's paradox of happiness* (1974), is, in fact, that wealth (or utility) and happiness (or social well-being in the perspective of the common good), are not the same thing, because to be happier, it is not enough to just pursue profit but it is necessary to go into the sphere of relationships between people (*relational goods*), and not so much with a hedonistic approach (based on pleasure), typically self-serving economically, but eudemonistic (based on happiness, in the Aristotelian sense of "good life"). Therefore, not only according to the subject's self-referential perception, but in reciprocity, and in view of solidarity.

To understand what relational goods are, we can say that they cannot be 'produced' or 'consumed' by a single individual, because they depend on the methods and motivations of the interactions between people. Therefore, they can be enjoyed only if shared (common good). The relational good is a good, but it is free, it has a value, and not a price.

The data of the current economic sciences show us that when non-instrumental relationships become scarce (family, friends, and in general, free relationships) and income, on the other hand, grows, this increase in income comes at the 'cost' of a worsening of one's relational life, which consumes subjective happiness, bringing about a combination of economic growth, yet a decrease in one's subjective well-being.

This shows that within the economic system it is necessary, and not optional, to safeguard relationships and, first and foremost, the pivotal role of the family, that is, of that place of primary

relationships necessary for the person to be able to fully realize one's personality, identity and project in life. To this end, however, it is necessary that the system changes its gaze towards two subjects: towards the individual, who is not only an individual, but a subject in relation to other subjects with whom he or she has strong ties, and where he or she can rely on the social economic system to see his or hers relational assets safeguarded and, therefore, for the pursuit of one's happiness; and secondly, towards the family, which is not a burden or a cost, but the main engine capable of generating stability, security, virtues, supportive and free attitudes, which can empower the economic system morally.

All this implies:

1. the need to abandon the individualistic conception of the person: each of us is a familiar subject in relationship. The economic system must take account of these relationships and the roles that people have in the family, so that people can be happy and feel fulfilled;
2. the need to recognize the subjectivity and the social priority of the family, as the foundation of the common good;
3. To promote working conditions and mechanisms for redistributing the balance between care roles and professional roles in the labor market, so that young men and women do not have to abandon the family and especially the family project;
4. To clearly acknowledge that the economy is not entrusted with the goal of the realization of man and good human coexistence, but a *partial task*: the production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 331). In fact, economic growth to the detriment of the basic needs of the person in relational and family terms, which reduces personal well-being and any possibility of realizing the common good, is not acceptable.
5. A renewal of economic models based also on our personal conversion and generosity towards the neediest. The common good connects us all. The pandemic has shown that we are indeed all brothers, linked together, interconnected. And where one is sick, the whole social body is affected. This is so everywhere in the world. We must work so that sharing, solidarity and communion become the principles of a market as a space for people to meet, governed by trust and transparency. The market cannot be governed by an "invisible hand", where the other is an anonymous faceless stranger, but a *common house* where everyone can live without being excluded or left behind, where everyone has a name and can make his or her own voice heard. Kierkegaard said that "the door to happiness opens only outwards: those who try to force it in the opposite direction, end up closing it more and more" (*Aut-Aut*, "Opere" 1972). This also applies to the economy, which acts in our common home.