The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE ITALIAN NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF MUTILATED AND INVALID WORKERS

Clementine Hall
Monday, 11 September 2023

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I welcome you on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of your association. It was 1943, a decisive year for Italy in the Second World War. You took your first steps in that context, which reminds us that every armed conflict brings with it scores of casualties, even today; and that the civilian population suffers the dramatic consequences of the madness that is war. Once the conflict is over, the debris remains, also in bodies and hearts, and peace must be rebuilt day by day, year by year, through the protection and promotion of life and its dignity, starting with the weakest and starting with the most disadvantaged.

Today, then, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all of you. Thank you, first and foremost, for what you continue to do for the protection and representation of the victims of accidents in the workplace, and the widows and orphans of the fallen. I still have in mind those five brothers killed by a train while they were working. Thank you for keeping the spotlight on the theme of safety in the workplace, where too many deaths and misfortunes still occur. Thank you for the initiatives you promote to improve civil legislation in matters of accidents at work and the professional rehabilitation of the disabled. Finally, it is a question not only of ensuring the proper welfare and social security care for those who suffer from forms of disability, but also of giving new opportunities to people who can be reintegrated and whose dignity demands to be fully

recognized. Thank you, finally, for your work in raising public awareness of accident prevention and safety policies, especially regarding women and the young. Tragedies and dramas in the workplace unfortunately do not cease, despite the technology we have at our disposal to promote safe places and times. Sometimes it seems like a war bulletin. This happens when work is dehumanized and, instead of being the tool through which human beings realize themselves by making themselves available to the community, it becomes an exasperated race for profit. And this is bad. Tragedies begin when the goal is no longer man, but productivity. And man becomes a machine for production. Friends, the educational tasks and the formative tasks ahead of you are still crucial, both with regard to employees and employers, and within society. Safety at work is like the air we breathe: we realize its importance only when it is tragically lacking, and it is always too late!

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10: 30-37) is repeated: when faced with people who are injured and at risk of being abandoned on the roadside of life, we can act like those two religious figures, the priest and the Levite, who, in order not to contaminate themselves, do not stop and instead go straight on, indifferent. And in the world of work, it sometimes happens just like that: we go on, as if nothing happened, devoted to the idolatry of the market. But we cannot get used to accidents at work, nor resign ourselves to indifference towards them. We cannot accept the waste of human life. Deaths and injuries are a tragic social impoverishment that affects everyone, not just the companies or families involved. We must not tire of learning and re-learning the art of caring, in the name of common humanity. In fact, safety is not only guaranteed by good legislation, which must be enforced, but also by the ability to live as brothers and sisters in the workplace.

The Apostle Paul, reflecting on the value of corporeity, asks an extremely topical question; he says: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own”, and he concludes, “Glorify God in your body” (*1 Cor* 6:19-20). Saint Paul refers to the affections, but we can extend our view to the world of work too. If the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, it means that, by caring for its frailty, we give praise to God. Humanity is therefore a “place of worship” and care is the attitude with which we collaborate in the very work of the Creator. This is how far the Christian faith goes: the centrality of the person as temple of the Holy Spirit knows no rejection, it knows no buying of or bartering on human life. One cannot, in the name of greater profit, demand too many working hours, decreasing concentration, or think of counting insurance or safety requirements as unnecessary expenses and loss of earnings.

Safety at work is an integral part of care for people. Indeed, for an employer, it is the first duty and the first form of good. Instead, forms that tend in the opposite direction, or which can be summarized in the word *carewashing*, are widespread. It happens when employers or legislators, instead of investing in safety, prefer to whitewash their consciences with some charitable work. It is bad. In this way they place their public images before everything else, making themselves

benefactors in culture or in sport, in good works, making works of art or buildings of worship accessible, but not paying attention to the fact that, as a great father and doctor of the Church teaches, “the glory of God is the living man” (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, IV,20,7). This is the first job: taking care of our brothers and sisters, of the body of our brothers and sisters. Responsibility towards workers is paramount: life is not sold for any reason, even more so if it is poor, precarious and fragile. We are human beings and not machines; unique persons and not spare parts. And very often some workers are treated like spare parts.

Therefore, I reiterate my gratitude for your commitment and I encourage you to go forward, to help society to progress from a cultural point of view, to understand that the human being comes before economic interest, that every person is a gift for the community and that maiming or disabling a single person wounds the entire social fabric. I entrust you to the protection of Saint Joseph, patron of all workers. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please, pray for me, I am in need. Thank you!

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