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Audience with a delegation of young French businesspeople

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of young French businesspeople.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Ladies and gentlemen!

I am pleased to welcome you, company directors and entrepreneurs, who have come from France on a pilgrimage to become more deeply rooted in the faith, in order to bear witness to it in your personal life and professional activity. It is a joy for me to see this desire in you to follow the teachings of the Gospel; in you who hold positions of responsibility in the economic and social spheres, who are aware that you have a role to play in the future of our societies and the world, and who intend to commit yourselves in this regard.

I am well aware that it is not easy in daily life to reconcile the demands of faith and the social teaching of the Church with the needs and constraints imposed by the laws of the market and of globalization. But I believe that the evangelical values that you wish to implement in the management of your businesses, as well as in the many relationships that you have within the framework of your activities, are an opportunity for genuine and indispensable Christian witness. Indeed, for you it is a question of participating, in accordance with your status as lay faithful, in the regal service of Christ, as Vatican Council II explains when it exhorts: "By their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, [the laity] vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected [...] for the benefit of all men [and may they be] more equitably distributed among all men, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 36).

May this pilgrimage enlighten your discernment of the choices you must make: it has never been easy to be a

Christian and have serious responsibilities. The fact of distancing oneself from the world – in what is contrary to God and His will – the fact of wanting to transform this world and save it with Christ, can sometimes lead to martyrdom, as attested by Saint Peter and Saint Paul. However, these glorious witnesses show us that the Gospel message of which they were bearers, a message apparently weak compared to the worldly powers of power and money, is not a utopia, but, with the power of the Holy Spirit and the support of the faith of courageous missionary disciples, can become a reality, a reality always unfinished, certainly, and to be renewed.

The conflicts of conscience in the daily decisions you have to make are – I imagine – numerous: on the one hand, the need imposed on you – often for the survival of companies, of the people who work there and of their families – to conquer markets, increase productivity, reduce delays, resort to the artifices of advertising, increasing consumption...; and on the other hand, the increasingly urgent demands of social justice, to guarantee everyone the possibility of earning a decent living. I am thinking of working conditions, wages, job offers and their stability, as well as environmental protection. How can we live out these conflicts in serenity and hope, while Christian entrepreneurs are sometimes led to silence their convictions and ideals?

A criterion for discernment may be found in the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of Vatican Council II, where, with regard to the laity engaged in temporal realities, it is said: “It is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role” (43).

In the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, to which I refer you to nurture your prayer and your reflection, a certain evaluation is made of the situation in the world, of certain systems that regulate its economic activities, with their consequences for people and the environment. It is an evaluation which may seem at times severe, but which leads – I believe – to a cry of alarm at the deterioration of our common home, as well as at the multiplication of poverty and slavery which innumerable human beings know today. Everything is connected.

Faced with this reality, and being actors, as far as you are concerned, in the systems in question, you certainly do not have an immediately effective response to give to the challenges of today's world. In this, you may sometimes feel powerless. And yet you have an essential role to play. Because, even in a modest way, in some concrete changes of habits and style, whether in relationships with your direct collaborators, or even better in the dissemination of new corporate cultures, it is possible for you to take action to change things tangibly and, little by little, to educate the world of work in a new style.

You also have the opportunity to get together, to work together, to make proposals at all levels, to participate in political decisions. As the recent Synod on the Amazon highlighted, it is a question of effecting a “conversion”. Conversion is a process that acts in depth: perhaps a slow process, seemingly, especially when it comes to converting mentalities, but the only one that allows real progress, if implemented with conviction and determination through concrete actions.

Finally, this “ecological conversion” cannot be separated from spiritual conversion, which is its indispensable condition. And everyone must turn to his own conscience and responsibility. “Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption” (Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 222). I invite you, already in your personal life, to commit yourselves to this path of simplicity and sobriety (cf. *ibid.*); the decisions you have to take in your work can only be freer and more serene, and you yourselves will draw greater peace and joy from them. Because “simplicity ... allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack” (*ibid.*).

Thank you again for your visit. I assure you of my prayers for you, for your families, for your companies and their staff, and I entrust all of you to the care of the Virgin Mary. And I ask you please to pray for me. Thank you!

