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Message of the Holy Father to French entrepreneurs (Paris, 28 to 29 August 2023)

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to French entrepreneurs, gathered on 28 and 29 August in the Longchamp Hippodrome, Paris, the text of which was read out yesterday afternoon by Bishop Matthieu Rougé of Nanterre:

Message of the Holy Father

I am happy to be able to send you, dear French entrepreneurs, this brief message on the occasion of your annual meeting. When I think of business leaders, the first words that come to mind are “Common Good”. Indeed, it is impossible today to imagine any improvement in the Common Good, in other words in economic and social life, in justice, in the living conditions of the poorest, without considering businesspeople as agents of development and well-being. You are an essential driver of wealth, prosperity and public happiness.

This is not an easy period for anyone, and the business world is suffering too, sometimes very much, for a number of reasons, not least this absurd war and, before that, the very difficult years of the pandemic. Entrepreneurs suffer when their business suffers, and they suffer a great deal when the business goes bankrupt and has to close. There is little in the media about the difficulties and pain of entrepreneurs who close their businesses and fail through no fault of their own. The book of Job teaches us that misfortune is not synonymous with fault, because it also strikes the righteous, and that success is not immediately synonymous with virtue and goodness. Misfortune affects everyone, the good and the bad alike. The Church understands the suffering of the good entrepreneur, she understands your suffering. She welcomes it, she accompanies you, she thanks you. From the very beginning, the Church has also welcomed merchants, the precursors of modern entrepreneurs. In the Bible and the Gospels, there is often talk of money and trade, and some of the most beautiful stories in the history of salvation are also about economics: drachmas, talents, landowners, administrators, precious pearls. In the Gospel of Luke, the father of the prodigal son is presented to us as a rich man, perhaps a landowner. In the same way, the Good Samaritan could have been a merchant; he stopped by the wounded man, took care of him and then entrusted him to an innkeeper, paying him with two denarii.

Today, an increasingly important way of participating in the Common Good is to create jobs, jobs for everyone, especially young people - trust young people: they need work, and you need them. Every new job created is shared wealth, which does not end up in the banks to generate financial interest, but is invested so that new people can work and make their lives more dignified. Work is legitimately important. For if it is true that work ennobles man, it is even truer that it is man who ennobles work. It is we, and not the machines, who are the true value of work.

Businesspeople are also workers. They live through work, they live by working, and they remain entrepreneurs for as long as they work. When the entrepreneur stops working, he becomes a speculator or a rentier, and changes profession. The good entrepreneur, like the "good shepherd" of the Gospel, unlike the "hireling", knows his workers because he knows their work. One of the serious crises of our time is the entrepreneur's loss of contact with the work of his company, and therefore with his workers, who become "invisible" (Pierre Y. Gomes). You became entrepreneurs because one day you were fascinated by the smell of the workshop, by the joy of touching your products with your hands, by the satisfaction of seeing that your services are useful: never forget that this is how your vocation was born. And in this you are like Joseph, like Jesus who spent part of his life working as a craftsman: "the Word became a carpenter". He knew the aroma of wood.

One last word. The first capital of your company is you: your heart, your conscience, your virtues, your will to live, your justice. This human, ethical and spiritual capital is worth more than economic and financial capital. Today, the new challenges of our complex society cannot be met without good entrepreneurs. You can live your work as a vocation, as a moral task, as an existential destiny. But a company is not enough, the economy is too little for you: your creativity and innovation are also needed in civil society, in communities, in the care of creation. Without new entrepreneurs, our planet will not withstand the impact of capitalism. So far, you have done something, some of you have done a lot: but it is not enough. This is an urgent time, a very urgent time: we must, you must, do more: the children will thank you, and I with them.

I pray that your work and efforts will bear abundant and lasting fruit, and I send you my warmest greetings.

From the Vatican, 13 July 2023

FRANCIS
