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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the second edition of “LaborDi: a building site to generate work”, organized by ACLI, Rome

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the second edition of “LaborDi: a building site to generate work”, organized by the Christian Associations of Catholic Workers (ACLI) in Rome, taking place today at the Auditorium of Technology Congress Centre:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I am happy to share some words with you on the theme of work. I tried to imagine how you, young people of our city, position yourselves before the world of work; what hopes and fears you cultivate. An image came to mind, one of a large building site: there are many in Rome at the moment! It is an image that reveals two contrasting aspects: on the one hand, a worksite, when there is no-one working there, offers to the onlooker *a sense of emptiness*; on the other, when it is active, it shows the *hurried activity* of the many people involved. That is how I see work today: as a beautiful construction site open to building the future, within which, however, one breathes, on the one hand, a sense of emptiness and, on the other, an overload of stress caused by feverish activity.

A sense of emptiness: the word “work” today, unfortunately, often evokes the lack thereof, and this represents a serious wound to the dignity of many people. But dignity is wounded also when work is not sufficiently stable and compromises plans and life choices, such as the creation of a family and the desire for children. This “job vacuum” is like a ground that shifts under one’s feet, forcing one to walk in precarious equilibrium: does it not happen like this, among internships, internships, casual and temporary jobs? And again: how is it possible to enter the work site with dignity, if before that, in the years of study and specialization, one is forced to fight for the right to a roof to sleep under? Faced with this sense of emptiness, many people, disoriented and demotivated, give up and go elsewhere, but this, besides causing bitterness, constitutes a defeat, because resources are not lacking, and should be used to realize tangible dreams, such as that of a stable and lasting job, a family to form, time to dedicate freely to others in voluntary work. It is necessary, above all, to counter the

perception of emptiness that lurks in the heart of many young people who, as time passes, have the growing impression that they are not going anywhere, and inherit a harmful message from us adults: that in life, nothing is stable. Fixed-term contracts, jobs so short-lived they prevent one from planning a life, low income and low protection seem to be the walls of a labyrinth from which there is no way out. Dear young people, you need, just as you need bread, someone to take you by the hand and help you overcome this precariousness and this sense of emptiness, pulling you out of the quicksand of insecurity: that is why I would like to tell you that your initiative is close to my heart!

This can help you reflect also on the opposite extreme to the sense of emptiness: that *febrile activity* present today in worksites, where there is never enough time and the imperatives of productivity become ever more demanding and overwhelming. If first I spoke to you about work that is lacking, here there is work that crushes: constant pressure, a forced pace, stress that causes anxiety, relational space increasingly sacrificed in the name of profit at all costs. It is “commodified” work that is growing in our context, dominated by a market that in order to be competitive, is becoming increasingly fast and complex. With some dismal prospects lurking in the background: that of illegality, an escape route from responsibility towards illegal work, which ends up dragging the conscience to the same level; that of dehumanized work, where modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence and robotics, threaten to substitute the presence of humans; and finally, increasingly scandalous and worrying, that of the lack of safety at work, a side-effect of the feverish race to produce more at any cost. How many victims are still claimed by the workplace!

Dear friends, even if today’s worksite presents these situations, I would like to invite you not to lose hope, because work always preserves within itself *a unique and irreplaceable vocation*, that of *hope*. Indeed, hope is not optimism that depends on circumstances, but rather trust that is engendered through the committed and participatory construction of the common good. Work, therefore, is the protagonist of hope: it is the way to feel active in the good as servants of the community, because taking care of others is the best way not to worry about useless things. Work again becomes a building site of hope, a building site of dreams! You are together to consolidate a project, the name of which I like very much: “A building site to generate work”. Generate is the verb of life and it is beautiful that work, before being productive, is generative: in fact, it is not an accessory, but an essential component of existence, as it confers dignity and hope.

Your event proposes this generative vision, motivating you and making you reflect, and also promoting concrete accompaniment, to help you understand the employment picture in the area and seize opportunities, to help you acquire skills and tools so that you can enter the labour market more competently. I appreciate, in particular, one aspect: the desire to create a stable fabric or, as you say, to establish lasting connections: in fact, “*LaborDi*” involves the Church, the world of education, institutions, the third sector, trade unions, associations, entrepreneurs and companies, which need to tap the wealth of young people and their dreams. How important it is to think and plan work together, without ideological contrapositions and sterile isolation: not the logic of the interest group, but that of collaboration will bear fruit. It will do so if we look at real people, not partisan interests. This joint approach today is the only one capable of fully addressing the major Italian issues, such as the birth rate crisis, the environmental issue and, indeed, work.

Best wishes, then, for this day! Open construction sites of hope, that will enable you and many other young people to embrace the beauty of a dignified job. I am with you, and I bless you from my heart.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 1 December 2023

FRANCIS
