



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Audience with the Transports and Materials Corps of the Italian Army

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience the Transports and Materials Corps of the Italian Army, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Christopher as patron.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father to those present during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

*Mr. General,
Members of the Transports and Materials Corps of the Italian Army
Dear brothers, dear sisters!*

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Christopher as your patron on 4 November 1954 by the Venerable Pope Pius XII. I too am devoted to Saint Christopher; I always carry a medallion of Saint Christopher because it helps me to go forward.

I rejoice that a military Corps has asked for and obtained the high patronage of a martyr Saint, who gave his life to bear witness to Christ. This means first of all acknowledging that there is no profession or state of life that does not need to be anchored to true values, and that does not need divine protection.

On the contrary, one could state that, the more one's profession involves the possibility of saving lives or losing them, of bringing support, help and protection, the greater the need to maintain a high ethical code and an inspiration that draws from above.

To have a patron Saint and to be proud of this means committing oneself, in serving the homeland, to working with a style that places at the forefront the dignity of every human person, who is the image of the Creator: we

are images of God. A style that is distinguished for its defence of the weakest and those who find themselves in danger, whether through wars, natural disasters or pandemics.

To honour your patron also means recognizing that the skill, sense of duty, and self-sacrifice of each and every one of you are certainly necessary, but that in addition to all this we must also implore from Heaven that supplement of Grace, which is indispensable to best accomplish the missions we undertake. It means, in short, recognizing that we are not omnipotent, that not everything is in our hands, and that we need divine blessing.

I congratulate you for this sensitivity, for the fact that you are aware of the value and delicacy of your tasks, which would not be extraordinary in themselves, but can suddenly become so. You are well aware of this: they become so when you are called upon to intervene in peacekeeping operations, or to deal with the consequences of natural disasters, carrying out civil protection tasks and indispensable logistical activities.

Indeed, you have lent your services to support citizens and local and territorial authorities in various moments of emergency such as earthquakes, floods, pandemics. You have set up camps, tents and field hospitals, you have transported basic necessities, useful materials for reconstruction and vaccinations.

You have also been present outside national borders in the context of peacekeeping missions, providing supplies, both for military logistics and for the transport and distribution of various materials and goods for humanitarian purposes.

The punctual, well-coordinated and constant performance of all these activities has a precise name: service. It involves placing oneself at the disposal of the common good, not sparing energy and effort, not backing down in the face of danger in order to complete one's task, which often results in saving lives and may involve sacrificing one's own safety. Service, serving, and service gives us dignity. What is your dignity? I am a servant: that is the great dignity!

In this regard, it is significant that many men and women, at the end of their active service, do not leave the Transport and Materials Corps, but choose to join the National Association of Italian Airmen. As volunteers, they offer their help to the community, bearing witness to the fact that the readiness to serve has become a natural habit in them, like a normal feature of their existence, which cannot be discarded from one moment to the next, but instead must be calibrated according to the age and condition of each individual, because everyone, at any age, can make their contribution, continuing to serve.

Christopher means "He who carries Christ". When you commit yourselves daily, sparing no effort for the functionality of your departments; when you go to help populations afflicted by natural disasters or armed conflicts, you, sometimes without knowing it, in a certain sense carry the style of Christ, who came to serve and not to be served (cf. *Mt* 10:45): this is Jesus, who passed over this earth benefiting and healing all (cf. *Acts* 10:38).

Sisters and brothers, let us ask your patron Saint Christopher to keep you always in these good intentions. And, in this regard, I will adopt an expression from the "*Prayer of the Helper*", which goes like this: "Almighty and eternal God, protect and bless the service we render to our brothers and sisters, and give us the ability to use our means also to succour and save those in need".

May Mary, Mother of God, protect and accompany you; may she obtain for you to be peacemakers and artisans of peace. From my heart I bless you all and I bless your families. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
