



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE COLDIRETTI VILLAGE

Dear brothers and sisters, I warmly greet you all, gathered in Rome for this important meeting attended by farmers and entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector from the various regions of Italy.

In the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, Saint John XXIII wished to emphasize the enriching value of agricultural work for the integral promotion of the person, both on the human level, as an eminent way of individual fulfilment and community development, and on the level of the spirit, as a participation in the fulfilment of God's providential plan in history.

Agricultural work, the Supreme Pontiff affirmed, "should be thought of as a vocation, a God-given mission", [1] inasmuch as it sheds light on the "responsorial" dimension of man's calling to actuate the Kingdom of heaven.

Indeed, creation was desired by God as a gift and a legacy entrusted to man [2]. Made in and through the eternal Word, it did not come forth from the hands of the Creator already "finished", but "in a state of being", that is, open and directed towards a fulfilment. In handing it over to man, as a possession to be guarded, God has disposed that he should contribute to directing it towards that perfection to which it is destined and which will be reached at the end of time [3]. Therefore, responding to God's original and ever-present invitation to make the earth sprout and bear fruit, to transform it with respect and care, means cooperating with God's initial project.

The book of *Genesis* highlights from the very beginning how in agricultural work man was offered the opportunity to educate himself to recognize in creation the sign of the covenant God had made with him. After making the heavens and the earth, the Lord realized that the earth was barren and bare, without field grass, not only because he had not made it rain, but also because there was no one to work the land, nor to bring water up from the earth into the channels to irrigate the soil (cf. *Gen 2:4-6*). God, then, moulded man with dust from the soil, animated him with his breath of life, and planted a wonderful garden so that he might "till it and keep it" (*Gen 2:15*).

Man is called by God to perform with intelligence a technical activity associated with the duty of

stewardship, not only material, but also moral. In the *Genesis* account, learning the rules of agriculture, how to build canals to alter the course of rivers, are tasks to be performed with a twofold benefit in mind: making the earth more beautiful and fruitful, while at the same time making it more humane, more welcoming and hospitable to the lives of its inhabitants. As man works, he changes the world, but he also changes himself by becoming more responsible and generous.

The industrious and generative dynamism of agricultural work is further clarified in the light of the revelation of the Gospel of Christ: God's command to "have dominion over ... all the earth" (*Gen* 1:26) is expressed as participation in the kingship of the crucified and risen Lord, in the logic of love that becomes service and frees the world from the corruption and transience of sin (cf. *Rom* 8:19-20).

We witness today the development of new technologies, ever more efficient and high-performance, thanks to which man is able to increase his power over nature, often forcing the earth to bear fruit. The ill-considered and coercive use of technology, applied at unsustainable production rates, subjected to homologising consumption models, comes at a very high price. This is demonstrated by the climate crisis we are currently experiencing: the environmental impact of the intensive rhythms adopted to date has negatively affected crops, creating vicious circles from which it is increasingly difficult to redeem ourselves. The more we mistreat the earth, polluting water and air, the more we take away biodiversity, cutting down forests and compromising ecosystems, the more difficult it becomes to cope with unstable weather events. Cultivating the land while heat waves, torrential rains and sudden cold frosts increase makes agricultural work an increasingly difficult undertaking.

It is not only nature that pays the price, but also the poor. It is the "scandalous" paradox of the throwaway culture: we produce enough food to feed the entire world population, but most of them live without their daily bread. Therefore, it is the duty of all to eradicate this injustice through concrete actions and good practices, through local and international policies that have the courage to choose the just, and not only the useful, the convenient, the profitable [4]. As you reflect on how to enhance the distinctiveness and quality of *Made in Italy* agrifood products, I invite you to remember those who do not have enough to eat.

Please, let us not forget the poor. Let us dream of a world in which water, bread, work, medicine, land, and a home, are goods available to every individual.

I pray that the Lord may instill in you all the courage and ardour to plant seeds of peace that will help build a more fraternal world, and I implore God, the giver of all good, that he may grant you abundant blessings.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 6 October 2023

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[1] John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, no. 149 (EN).

[2] Cf. CCC, no. 299.

[3] Cf. CCC, no. 302.

[4] Cf. Francis, *Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the Pre-Summit on the “Food System Summit 2021”*, (Vatican City, 26 July 2021).

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