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Audience with the members of the Italian Association of Private Construction Contractors (ANCE)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Italian Association of Private Construction Contractors (ANCE), on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its founding.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the President for his words of greeting. I receive you on the occasion of your 75th anniversary, held in recent months; an opportunity to remember a history that dates back to the aftermath in Italy of the Second World War. The Italian Association of Private Construction Contractors was indeed established in 1946 as a business association representing Italian companies of all sizes working in the field of construction.

I think this is a difficult period for your sector too. And in these times, it is important to draw on motivation, on fundamental choices. For my part, I would like to share with you some Gospel teachings that can help you in your work. It is a Christian interpretation of the values that inspire you: competition and transparency; responsibility and sustainability; ethics, legality and security.

The Gospel testifies that Jesus, in his preaching, also used the metaphor of construction to convey his messages. This is the case, for example, in chapter 6 of the Gospel of Luke (vv. 46-49), where, among other things, Jesus exposes the hypocritical and lazy behaviour of those who only talk without doing. Showing the wisdom of the building engineer, he compares the charlatans to those who build houses on sandy ground without foundations. Of course, Jesus is not thinking of great buildings, but he points out that these constructions are built by the river, while the good builder knows that at the first flood such a house is destined to be swept away.

His parable continues with the other side of the coin: “Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them ... he is like a man building a house, who dug deep, and laid the foundation upon rock” (vv. 47-48). The image is even more interesting if we think that this kind of builder not only did the right thing in the present moment; he also defended the house from possible future floods. One might say: but this has never happened! Yes, but it might happen. It is what we are witnessing today with climate change: things are happening that never happened before.

In Jesus’ preaching, the believer is one who does not limit himself to appearing Christian on the outside, but who actively works as a Christian. And it is precisely this “operational consistency” that enables him to build himself up not only in the normal times of life, but to remain so even in difficult moments. This also means that faith does not protect us from bad weather, but, accompanied by good works, it strengthens us and makes us capable of resisting it. And it is precisely in this sense that the values that inspire your membership of the Association must be preserved and embodied on a daily basis.

Competition and transparency. Competition alone is not enough. In the utilitarian logic of the market, it can lead to opposition to the point of eliminating the other. It deludes one into thinking that one can win over the other or that the other's defeat is to be factored into the economy. When this happens, it undermines the social fabric of trust that allows the market itself to function properly. Competition must be an incentive to do better and well, not a desire for domination and exclusion. That is why transparency in decision-making processes and economic choices is essential. Competition and transparency together. It makes it possible to avoid unfair competition, which in the economic and employment spheres often means job losses, support for undeclared work or underpaid work. It ends up favouring forms of corruption that feed on the murk of illegality and injustice. And this is not the right path: it is a path that is unhealthy and not good.

Responsibility and sustainability. Never before have we heard so much about sustainability: it calls into question the regenerative power of every ecosystem. In the construction sector, the use of materials that provide security to people is fundamental. At the same time, we must avoid exploiting the environment by cooperating in making certain particularly exploited territories unviable. Every company can make a responsible contribution to making work sustainable.

Furthermore, sustainability is linked to the beauty of places and the quality of relationships. Here I would like to return to a reflection from the encyclical *Laudato si'* on the relationship between urban spaces and human behaviour: “Those who design buildings, neighbourhoods, public spaces and cities ought to draw on the various disciplines which help us to understand people’s thought processes, symbolic language and ways of acting. It is not enough to seek the beauty of design. More precious still is the service we offer to another kind of beauty: people’s quality of life, their adaptation to the environment, encounter and mutual assistance. Here too, we see how important it is that urban planning always take into consideration the views of those who will live in these areas” (150). May your work help communities to strengthen bonds of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual assistance.

Ethics, legality and safety. Last year, too many people died at work. They are not numbers, they are people. Construction sites, too, have seen tragedies that we cannot ignore. Unfortunately, if we look at safety in the workplace as a cost, we are starting from the wrong assumption. People are the real wealth. I am reminded of what happened in the construction of the Tower of Babel. At that time, bricks were difficult to make, because they had to take the straw, the grass, then make the mass, bake, a huge job. A brick was, perhaps not worth a fortune, but it cost money. If a brick fell during the construction of the tower, it was a tragedy, and the worker who was responsible was punished. But if a worker fell, nothing happened. This must make us think! People are the real wealth: without them there is no working community, no enterprise, no economy. Workplace safety means safeguarding human resources, which are of inestimable value in the eyes of God and also in the eyes of the true entrepreneur. For this reason, legality must be seen as the protection of the highest patrimony, which is people. Working safely allows everyone to express the best of themselves while earning their daily bread. The more we take care of the dignity of work, the more certain we are that the quality and beauty of the work carried out will increase.

May Saint Joseph, patron saint of workers, support you in your efforts. I too accompany you with my prayers and my blessing. And I ask you to do what the president said: to pray for me. Thank you.
