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Audience with the members of the “Social Soul in Business Values” Association

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Social Soul in Business Values” Association, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear ladies and gentlemen!

I thank the President for her words of introduction, and I warmly welcome you all.

Within the Union of Industrialists and Businesses of the Province of Latium, twenty years ago you established this association, with the aim of ethical and social advancement. That is why you chose to use the word “soul”: a very demanding word! It makes one think of something that does not have its own visibility, but which stimulates and motivates your working environment from within. It is up to you leaders, above all, to take stock of the objectives reached in these twenty years. For my part, I would like to encourage you and offer you some points for reflection.

Today, keeping our focus on the common good, it is necessary for politics and economics, in constant dialogue, to place themselves decisively in the service of life, of human life and the life of creation, our common home (cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 189), not in the service of non-life, or death, as unfortunately too often happens. The great financial crisis of 2007-2008 should have driven us in this direction. Yes, there was a positive reaction, but it seems to me that substantially the world continued, and continues, to be governed according to obsolete criteria. Not to mention the geopolitical-military sphere, where various regional wars and in particular the current war in Ukraine show that those who govern the fates of peoples have not yet learned the lesson of the tragedies of the twentieth century.

You, who primarily represent small- and medium-sized enterprises, are well aware of how difficult it is, in such a context, to develop and create employment that respects ethical values and social responsibility. But we must not become discouraged and resigned. One might think that ethical and social criteria are like a “cage” that stifles economic freedom and creativity. In reality, it is the contrary: or at least, it can be. Indeed, if we want the

future world to be inhabitable and worthy of humanity, it is necessary for the economy to be freer from the power of finance and more creative in seeking forms of production oriented towards an integral ecology. May the economy be concrete, not “liquid” or “gaseous”, as is the danger with finance. Globalization must be “governed”, so that the global does not come at the expense of the local, but so that the two dimensions remain in virtuous and fruitful connection.

Many, understandably, might say: but what can we small enterprises do, faced with the gigantic Goliath of financial and technocratic power? I think – and I hope – that the construction of a new economy, that respects human dignity and that of the environment, can and must start from the grass roots. Or indeed, as we know, it has already started from the bottom: throughout the world there are many experiences of ethical and sustainable businesses that are paving the way. It is necessary to promote communication and sharing between these experiences, so as to form a network capable of having an increasingly wide-ranging impact. I spoke about this theme of the new economy, the concrete economy, in the book, the most recent book I wrote, *Let us dream. Ritorniamo a sognare* is the Italian version. I focused on an analysis of this problem of the concreteness of the economy and of the visibility of the economy, to avoid what is defined as “liquidity” or “gaseousness”. Perhaps it can illustrate what I want to say here.

Finally, permit me to give some advice “as a bishop”: if you wish to be the “soul” of the business world, do not neglect to care for your own soul, that which comes from God. And for this reason, it is necessary to resist the temptation of activism, and find time to reflect, to think, to contemplate. At times activism destroys us inwardly; I am not talking about religiosity but of human interiority. Then, for a religion it is a personal option, but first there is human interiority. For this reason too, the association can be useful, with proposals. But it is above all a personal need: every person, if they wish to inspire, must let themselves be inspired inwardly by goodness, by beauty, by truth. This is shown by the example of Italian businesspeople who have known how to increase not only their profits, but also life, the quality of life, the quality of work, with freedom and creativity, because they had an enlightened conscience. And this leads you to creativity, it leads you – permit me the word – to poetry. Human work is also poetry: making things.

Dear businesspeople, I thank you for your visit. I wish you all the best in your work and in your activity as an association. May the Lord bless you, and your families. And pray for me, as I am in need. And if someone does not pray, or cannot pray, or does not want to pray, or does not know how to pray, at least send me good thoughts and good “waves”. Thank you.
