HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE
BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO
SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 230309f

Thursday 09.03.2023

Audience with managers and employees of the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL)

Today, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the managers and staff of the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (*Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro* (*INAIL*).

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I welcome you and I thank the President for his words. Thank you for referring to the social doctrine of the Church. I am glad of this meeting, to be able to encourage your commitment to, as the President said, "constructing a society in which no-one is left behind". You do so by working to protect the dignity of people in the work environment. We know that it is not always thus, and not everywhere. Often the burden of an accident falls on the shoulders of the family, and this temptation is manifested in various ways. The recent pandemic increased the number of reports in Italy, especially in the healthcare and transport sectors.

Thank you for the extra care you provided at the height of the health crisis, especially for the most fragile categories of the population. The last few months have also seen an increase in the number of female accidents, reminding us that the full protection of women in the workplace is not yet achieved. And on this also, I would say, there is a preemptive discouragement of women, for fear they may become pregnant; a woman is less "safe" because she can become pregnant. This is thought of at the time of taking her on: when she starts to "show", if you can send her away it is better. This is the mentality and we must fight against it.

The activity of your Institute is doubly valuable, both in terms of training to prevent accidents in the workplace, and in accompanying the injured and providing concrete support for their families. The service to which you

dedicate yourselves ensures that no-one feels abandoned to themselves. This is decisive. Without protection, society becomes increasingly enslaved to the throwaway culture. It ends up giving in to the utilitarian outlook with regard to the person, rather than recognizing his or her dignity. The terrible logic that spreads this rejection is summarized in the phrase: “You have value if you produce”. In this way, only those who manage to be part of the mechanism of activity count, and the victims are set aside, considered a burden and entrusted to the good-heartedness of families.

The Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* highlights that “this way of discarding others can take a variety of forms, such as an obsession with reducing labour costs with no concern for its grave consequences, since the unemployment that it directly generates leads to the expansion of poverty” (no.20). Among the consequences of a lack of investment in safety in the workplace, there is also an increase in accidents. Faced with this mentality, we need to remember that life is priceless. The health of a person cannot be exchanged for a few extra coins or someone’s individual interest. And we must unfortunately add that one aspect of the culture of rejection is the tendency to blame the victims. We see this all the time, it is a way of justifying, and it is a sign of the human poverty into which we risk causing relationships to fall, if we lose the correct hierarchy of values, which has the dignity of the human person at the top.

Dear friends, your presented today permits reflection on the meaning of work and on how it is possible, in different historical contexts, to connect it to the Gospel parable of the good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 25-37). Care for the quality of work, as well as for workplaces and transport, is fundamental if we want to promote the centrality of the person; when work is degraded, democracy is impoverished and social bonds are loosened. It is important to ensure that safety regulations are respected: they can never be seen as a burden or an unnecessary incumbrance. As is always the case, we only realize the value of health when it is lacking. Help can also come from the use of technology. For example, it has fostered the development of “remote” work, which can be a good solution in certain cases, as long as it does not isolate workers and prevent them from feeling they are part of a community. The clear separation of family and work environments has had negative consequences not only on the family, but also on the work culture. It has reinforced the idea that the family is the place of consumption and the workplace that of production. This is too simplistic. It has made people think that caring is the exclusive domain of the family and has nothing to do with work. It has risked promoting the mentality that people are worth what they produce, so that outside the world of production they lose value, identified exclusively with money. This is a habitual thought, a thought I would describe as not entirely conscious, but subliminal.

Your activity reminds us that the style of the good Samaritan is always relevant and has social value. “By his actions, the Good Samaritan showed that ‘the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions’” (*Fratelli tutti*, 66). When a person cries out for help, is in distress, and is in danger of being abandoned on the roadside of society, the prompt and effective commitment of institutions such as yours, which put into practice the verbs of the Gospel parable: *to see*, *to have compassion*, *to be close*, *to bind wounds*, *to take responsibility*, is crucial. And this is not a good business, it is always a loss!

I encourage you to look directly at all the forms of disability that arise. Not only the physical ones, but also the psychological, cultural and spiritual ones. Social neglect has repercussions on the way each of us looks at and perceives ourselves. “Seeing” the other also means treating people in their uniqueness and singularity, taking them out of the logic of numbers. The person is not a number. There is not the “injured person” but the name and face of the injured person. There is the noun, not the adjective: an injured person; no, it is a person who has suffered an injury. We are used to using adjectives too much, we are in a civilization that has lapsed somewhat into using adjectives too much and we are in danger of losing the culture of the noun. This is not an injured person, it is a person who has had an injury, but it is a person.

Do not give up on compassion – it is not a minor thing, for women, for old ladies, no, it is a very important human reality, which means: I share this because I have a certain compassion, which is not the same as *lástima* [Spanish: pity], but rather it is sharing a destiny. It means feeling the suffering of another in one’s own flesh. It is the opposite of indifference – we live in a culture of indifference – which leads us to look away, to go ahead without letting ourselves be touched inwardly. Compassion and tenderness are attitudes that reflect God’s style. If we ask ourselves what God’s style is, it is indicated by three words: closeness – God is always close, he never

conceals himself; mercy – he is merciful, he has compassion and therefore he is merciful; and third, he is tender, he has tenderness. Closeness, compassionate mercy and tenderness. This is God's style, and this is the path we must embark on.

The more one feels that one is fragile, the more one deserves closeness. In this way, barriers are broken down to find a common level of communication that is our humanity.

Binding wounds can mean taking time and removing any bureaucratic temptation. The person who has suffered an injury asks to be taken care of before being compensated. And any financial compensation acquires its full value in welcoming and understanding the person.

It is then a matter of taking responsibility, with the family, for the dramatic situation of a person who is forced to leave work due to an accident; to take care of them in a holistic way. This also demands creativity, so that the person feels accompanied and supported for what he or she is, and not with false pity. It is not a handout, it is an act of justice.

let us allow ourselves to be called upon by the wounds of our sisters and brothers - these wounds call to us, let us allow ourselves to be called upon - and let us trace paths of fraternity. Our insurance is provided by solidarity and charity, first and foremost. It does not only respond to criteria of legal justice, but is care for humanity in its different dimensions. When this fails, "every man for himself" rapidly translates into "free for all" (cf. *Fratelli tutti*, 36). Indifference is a sign of a desperate and mediocre society. I say "desperate" in the sense that it has no hope.

I entrust you to the protection of Saint Joseph, patron of all workers. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please pray for me. Thank you!