



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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Audience with the ACLI (Italian Christian Workers' Associations)

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the ACLI (Italian Christian Workers' Associations), on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of their founding.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters of the Italian Christian Workers' Associations!

I am pleased to welcome you as you are celebrating your eightieth anniversary. It is a long and rich history, which bears witness to your commitment and your dedication in service to the community. At eighty years old, you are a little younger than me, but your journey is very significant: and this anniversary is a good opportunity to reread your history, with its joys and difficult moments, and to express gratitude. With you, I thank the Lord who has accompanied and supported you along the way, also inspiring many people who, through the ACLI, have devoted their life to the service of workers, pensioners, young people, foreigners, and the many who find themselves in situations of need. The ACLI are a place where it is possible to meet the "saints next door", who do not end up on the front pages of the newspapers, but at times genuinely change things, for good!

This history is a legacy from which to draw vital energies, in order to look forward with hope and determination. In it we find the values that inspired your founders and which generations of your members have embodied over the course of the years, through an important presence in society. In this regard, today I would like to dwell on five characteristics of this style of yours, which I consider fundamental for your journey.

The first is the *popular style*. It is not just a matter of being close to the people, but of being and feeling part of the people. It means living and sharing the joys and daily challenges of the community, learning from the values and wisdom of simple people. A popular style implies recognizing that the great social projects and lasting transformations start from the grass roots, from shared commitment and collective dreams. But the true essence

of the people resides in solidarity and the sense of belonging. In the context of a fragmented society, we are in great need of places where people can experience this creative and dynamic sense of belonging, which helps to pass from “I” to “we”, to develop projects for the common good together and to find the ways and means to realize them. This is the vocation of your “circles”: to open the doors, to keep them open, to welcome people, to enable them to build bonds of solidarity and a sense of belonging, to embark together on a journey of integration that can develop “a multifaceted culture of encounter” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 220).

The second characteristic is the *synodal style*. To work together, to cooperate for the common good is fundamental. This synodal style is demonstrated by the presence of people from diverse cultural, social, political and even ecclesial backgrounds, and who are here with you today. But it is also a style that belongs to you structurally because, as your President wrote when introducing you, you are a set of “multiform and restless” associations. This is beautiful: you are multiform and restless, and this is a beautiful thing. This is good: the variety and restlessness – in a positive sense – that help you to walk together and also to mix with other forces in society, forming a network and promoting shared projects. I ask you to do this more and more, and to pay attention to the weak in society, so that no-one is left behind.

The third characteristic is a *democratic style*. Fidelity to democracy has always been a distinctive feature of the ACLI. Today we are in great need of it. A democratic society is one in which there is truly a place for everyone, in the reality of facts and not only in declarations and on paper. Therefore, the great deal of work you do is important above all to support those who risk marginalization: the young, to whom particular vocational training initiatives are destined; women, who often continue to suffer forms of discrimination and inequality; the most fragile workers and migrants, who in the ACLI find someone capable of helping them to obtain respect for their rights; and finally the elderly and pensioners, who all too easily find themselves “discarded” by society, and this is an injustice. You provide an important service to these people, which must not only remain in the sphere of welfare, but promote the dignity of each person and the possibility that each person can bring to bear his or her own resources and contribution.

Fourth: a *peaceful style*, that is, as peacemakers. In a world bloodied by so many wars, I know that I share your commitment and prayer for peace. This is why I say to you: let the ACLI be the voice of a culture of peace, a space in which to affirm that war is never “inevitable” while peace is always possible; and that this is true both in relations between states and in the life of families, communities and workplaces. Cardinal Martini, during a prayer vigil for peace, emphasized the ability to “intercede”, that is, to stand between the contending parties, putting a hand on the shoulder of both and accepting the risk that this entails (*Un grido di intercessione*, 29 January 1991). Those who build peace know how to take a clear position, but at the same time strive to build bridges, to listen and understand the different parties involved, promoting dialogue and reconciliation. Interceding for peace is something that goes far beyond mere political compromise, because it requires putting oneself on the line and taking a risk. Our world, as we know, is marked by conflict and division, and your witness as peacemakers, as intercessors for peace, is as necessary and valuable as ever.

Finally, a *Christian style*. I mention it last not as an appendix, but because it is the summary and the root of the other aspects we have spoken about. To whom can we look to understand what it means truly to be peacemakers, if not the Lord Jesus? Where can we find inspiration and strength to welcome everyone, if not in the life of Jesus? To assume a Christian style, then, means not only ensuring that there be a time for prayer in our meetings: this is good, but we must do more; to assume a Christian style means growing in familiarity with the Lord and in the spirit of the Gospel, so that it can permeate everything we do and so that our action has Christ’s style and makes it present in the world. In particular, faced with cultural perceptions that threaten to nullify the beauty of human dignity and to tear society apart, I invite you to cultivate “a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words” (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 6). It is the dream of Saint Francis of Assisi and of many other saints, of many Christians, of many believers of every faith. Brothers and sisters, may this be your dream too!

Dear friends of the ACLI, I thank you for your commitment and I urge you to pursue it with courage. May the Holy Spirit continue to make your work fruitful and to guide you in service to the community. Go forth with joy and in hope! I bless you from my heart. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
