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Audience with members of the Italian Financial Police on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of its founding

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Italian Financial Police on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Corps, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Mr. Minister,

Mr. General,

Your Excellency and dear Chaplains,

Dear Members of the Financial Police,

I welcome you with pleasure: I saw you this morning when you were entering here. I greet the Minister of Economy and Finance, the Commander General and all the officials. I greet and thank the Bishop Military Ordinary and the chaplains.

“In tradition, the future”. This is the motto of your 250th anniversary. In tradition there is the future. It refers to the roots that led to the founding of the Italian Financial Police, and gave a direction for growth. Born as a special Corps for financial surveillance and border defence, it has taken on the tasks of tax and economic-financial police, and sea policing, with an important mission in the field of rescue, both at sea and in the mountains. A historical reminder of this commitment is the help offered to Jewish refugees and the persecuted during the two great world wars.

A vast sphere of intervention, therefore, which aims to respond to problems with the tangibility of presence and timely action, while at the same time conveying a cultural alternative to certain evils that threaten to contaminate society.

Your Patron is Saint Matthew – today is his feast day – apostle and evangelist. Indeed, he was a “publican”, a tax collector, an occupation doubly despised in Jesus’ time, because it was subservient to imperial power, and because it was corrupt. I like to go to the church of the French to see that painting by Caravaggio, “The conversion of Matthew”, which symbolizes this so deeply. He represented a utilitarian and unscrupulous mentality, devoted only to the “god of money”.

In our times too, a similar logic affects social life, causing imbalances and marginalization: from food wastage – but this is a scandal, food wastage is a scandal! – from this waste, to the exclusion of citizens from benefiting from some of their rights. Even the State can end up a victim of this system; including those States that have vast resources but remain isolated in terms of finance or the global market. How does one explain hunger in the world today, when there is so, so much waste in developed societies? It is terrible. And another thing: if the production of weapons were to cease for a year, world hunger would end. Better to have weapons than solve hunger... Even the State can fall victim to this system: even those States which, despite having resources, as I said, remain isolated.

In this panorama, you are required to contribute to the justice of economic relationships, verifying compliance with the rules that govern the activities of individuals and businesses. Therefore, you oversee the duty of every citizen to contribute to the needs of the State according to equitable criteria, without favouring the strongest, and you counter the inappropriate use of the internet and social networks. With regard to both tax collection and the fight against undeclared and underpaid work – this is a scandal – or in any case work that is detrimental to human dignity, your action is of paramount importance.

And all this is your concrete and daily way of serving the common good, of being close to the people, of fighting corruption and promoting legality. That corruption that takes place under the table, no?

The word ‘corrupt’ “is reminiscent of the broken heart, stained by something, the ruined heart. [...] Corruption reveals an anti-social conduct so strong that it dissolves the validity of the relationships and pillars on which a society is founded”. Therefore, the answer, the alternative does not lie in norms alone, but in a “new humanism”.^[1] To re-found humanity.

The gaze of Jesus, placed on the young Matthew, says that the dignity and the life of man are the heart of the life of a people. You can contribute to the emergence of this new humanism also through your work in the service of the young people who apply to enter the Financial Police Corps and attend its schools. Initially they are perhaps looking only for a job, but they then find a specific training, which not only provides them with indispensable knowledge and experience, but also becomes education for life and the common good.

Matthew, in a certain sense, moved from the logic of profit to that of equity. But, in the school of Jesus, he also went beyond equity and justice and came to know gratuitousness, the gift of self that generates solidarity, sharing, inclusion. Gratuitousness is not just a financial dimension, it is a human dimension. Entering into the service of others, freely, without seeking profit for oneself. Because while justice is necessary, justice is not enough to fill those gaps that only gratuitousness, charity and love can heal.

You experience this, for example, when you organize the reception and rescue of migrants in danger in the Mediterranean: thank you for this, thank you. Or in your courageous interventions in the event of natural disasters, in Italy and elsewhere. But think of the fight against the scourge of drug trafficking, the merchants of death. Your service does not end with protection of the victims, but includes the attempt to help the rebirth of those who do wrong: indeed, by acting with respect and moral integrity you can touch consciences, showing the possibility of a different life.

In this way to one can and must construct an alternative to the globalization of indifference – the globalization of

indifference: provide an alternative to this – this globalization of indifference, which not only destroys with violence and war, but also neglects social care and the environment. In effect, the wealth of a nation is not solely in its GDP; it resides in its natural, artistic, cultural and religious heritage – and in the smile of its inhabitants, its children. Once, a head of State said to me: “I have a special measurement: the smile of children and the elderly. When both of them smile, things are not going too badly in a society”. It is curious, this ... and this favours creativity, openness to the world. You yourselves are citizens who safeguard this “wealth” of Italy, but are ready to go on international missions. There is a need for this impetus to solidarity towards the other as a way to peace and as a hope for a better future!

Brothers and sisters, I congratulate you, because you cooperate to foster the confidence and hope of the people. This people, that is all of us. And to nurture confidence, hope, smiles. I come back to this: the thermometer is, do the children smile? Do the elderly smile? Don't forget. And this important anniversary fits well with the theme of the Jubilee that the Church is preparing to celebrate, which is “Pilgrims of Hope”. I bless you from my heart, I bless your work and families. Please, do not lose your sense of humour, please! This is healthy! And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] *Preface* in Peter Turkson, *Corrosion: combatting corruption in the Church and in society*, Bologna 2017.
