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Audience with the Christian Workers' Movement

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Christian Workers' Movement, on the occasion of the fiftieth 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!

I welcome you and thank the President for his kind words. Fifty years ago, your Movement took its first steps under the blessing of Pope Saint Paul VI; and today you have come to share this moment of gratitude with me. Thank you for the good you have sown in these years of life. Thank you for the commitment with which you have placed yourselves at the service of Italian society through formation activities, circles, your patronage, your attention to the world of work in its various facets, and your civil service.

Fifty years is also a time to look realistically at your own history, made up of so much gratuitousness and also hard work in Christian witness. It is important not to indulge in self-celebratory forms, but to recognize the action of the Holy Spirit in the folds of your history, not so much in the conspicuous events, but rather in the humble, everyday ones. This anniversary could help you walk in two directions: a work of purification and a new sowing. Both: purifying and sowing.

Purification is necessary, always, for all of us and in all human experience. We are sinners and need mercy like the air we breathe. Readiness to convert, to allow oneself to be purified, to change life, to change style, is a sign of courage, of strength, not weakness; stubbornness is a sign of weakness. It is a matter of accepting the novelties of the Spirit without putting obstacles in their way: permitting the young to find space, so that their spirit of gratuitousness may be safeguarded and shared, so that the resourcefulness of the beginnings is not lost by favouring reassuring choices that do not help live the novelties of the times. You are a movement born in the

aftermath of Vatican Council II, and you are able to harvest the fruits of that ecclesial and social season. I encourage you to rediscover the zeal of the beginnings, clearly visible in the enthusiasm with which you live the ecclesial bond in the territories and in the gratuitousness of your service to workers' needs. The Council required us to read the signs of the times – and above all it set an example in this regard – therefore, aware of social changes, you might ask yourselves: how can we be faithful to the service of workers today? How can we live our commitment to ecological conversion and peacemaking? How can we inspire Italian society in the fields of economics, politics and employment, contributing to discernment with the criteria of integral ecology and fraternity?

Here are the reasons for a *new sowing* that awaits you. While we celebrate, we look forward. Indeed, this is not only a time to gather fruit: it is also a time to sow again. The difficult season we are living demands this of us. The pandemic and the war have made the social climate darker and more pessimistic. This requires us to be sowers of hope. Starting from yourselves, from your associative fabric: let your doors be open, let the young feel they are not only guests, but protagonists, with their capacity to imagine a different society.

I would also like to propose to you a *specific commitment on the theme of work*. You are movements of workers, and can contribute to bringing their concerns within the Christian community. It is important for workers to be at home in the parishes, in the associations, in groups and movements; for their problems to be taken seriously; for their request for solidarity to be heard. Indeed, work is undergoing a phase of transformation that must be accompanied. Social inequalities, the forms of slavery and exploitation, poverty in the family due to lack of employment or poorly-paid work are realities that must be heard in our ecclesial environments. They are more or less forms of exploitation: let us call them what they are. I urge you to keep your minds and hearts open to workers, especially the poor and defenceless; to give voice to the voiceless; to be concerned not so much about your members, but to be a leaven in the social fabric of the country, a leaven of justice and solidarity.

From the Gospel parable of the workers called at different hours of the day (cf. *Mt 20:1-16*), we learn that every season of history, like every time of the day, is a *fitting time* to give one's own contribution and to seek to offer an answer. No-one should feel excluded from work. Let there be no lack of commitment to promote work for women, to encourage young people to enter the workforce, with decent contracts and not starvation contracts, to safeguard time and breathing space for the family, for voluntary work and for the care of relationships. Please reject all forms of exploitation!

I know you refer to the *social doctrine of the Church*: I urge you to continue to do so and, if possible, even more. The principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, correctly conjugated, are the basis of a society that includes, that rejects no-one, and fosters participation. Without subsidiarity there is no true solidarity, because there is a risk of not giving voice to the skills and talents that flourish in intermediate bodies. Families, cooperatives, enterprises and associations are the living fabric of society. Giving them space and voice means releasing energy so that the common good is the fruit of commitment and solidarity among all.

The Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* reminds us that “providentially, many groups and organizations within civil society help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, its lack of attention to fundamental human rights and to the critical needs of certain groups. Here we can see a concrete application of the principle of subsidiarity, which justifies the participation and activity of communities and organizations on lower levels as a means of integrating and complementing the activity of the state” (no. 175). This ongoing third world war makes us aware that renewal comes from the bottom up, where relations are lived with solidarity and trust. Let us not be robbed of the courage for new beginnings of reconciliation and fraternity.

Dear friends, thank you for coming to celebrate your half-century of activity. May Saint Joseph inspire you always to live your work with faith and passion. I bless you all, and your families, from my heart. I wish you a happy Christmas! And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
