



The Holy See

This Easter, Christ tells us: “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me ... and this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me”. What immense gentleness these words have.

Pope Francis is of Christ, he belongs to Him, and now that he has left this earth, he is fully of Christ. The Lord took Jorge Bergoglio to him from his baptism, and throughout all his existence. He is of Christ, who promised the fullness of life for him.

You know the tenderness with which Pope Francis spoke of Christ, how he took pleasure in the sweet name of Jesus, as a good Jesuit. He knew well that he was His, and surely Christ did not leave him, He did not lose him. This is our hope, that we celebrate with Paschal joy under the precious light of this, today’s Gospel.

We cannot ignore that we are also celebrating the day of workers, who were so close to Pope Francis’ heart.

I remember a video he sent some time ago to a meeting of Argentinean businessmen. To them he said: “I will not tire of referring to the dignity of labour. Someone implied I propose a life without effort, or that I despise the culture of work”. Indeed, some dishonest people said that Pope Francis was defending the lazy, the drones, the delinquent, the idle.

But he insisted: “Imagine if that can be said of me, a descendant of Piedmontese people, who did not come to this country hoping to be supported, but with a great desire to roll up their sleeves and build a future for their families”. You can tell they had annoyed him.

Because for Pope Francis, work expresses and sustains the dignity of the human being, permitting him to develop his capacities, to help him grow in relationships, to feel like a collaborator with God in taking care of and improving this world, to make him feel useful to society and in solidarity with his loved ones. This is why work, regardless of hardships and difficulties, is a path of human maturation. And this is why he affirmed that work “is the best aid for the poor”. What is more, “there is no worse poverty than that which deprives of work and the dignity of work”.

It is worth remembering his words during his journey to Genoa. He said that “the entire social pact is built around work”, and that when there are problems with work “it is democracy that goes into crisis”. Then he took up with admiration what the Italian Constitution says in Article 1: ‘Italy is a democratic republic, founded on work’.

Behind this love for work is a strong conviction of Pope Francis: the infinite value of every human being, an immense dignity that must never be lost, that can never be ignored or forgotten.

But every person is so worthy, and must be taken so seriously, that it is not just a question of giving him things, but of promoting him. That is, that he may develop all the good he has in him, that he may earn bread with the gifts God has given him, that he may develop his capacities. In this way, every person is promoted in all his or her dignity. And this is where work becomes so important.

Now beware, Francis said. Another thing is some false talk of “meritocracy”. For it is one thing to assess a person’s merits and reward efforts. Another thing is the false “meritocracy”, which leads us to think that only those who are successful in life have merits.

Let us take a look at a person who was born into a good family and was able to increase his wealth, lead a good life with a nice house, car, holidays abroad. Everything is good. He was lucky enough to grow up in the right conditions and performed meritorious deeds. Thus, with skills and time he has built a very comfortable life for himself and his children.

At the same time, one who works with manual labour, with equal or greater merits due to the effort and time he has invested, has nothing. He did not have the good fortune to be born in the same context and, no matter how hard he works, he is barely able to survive.

Let me tell you about a case I cannot forget: a young man I saw several times near my home in Buenos Aires. I would find him on the street, doing his job, which was to collect cartons and bottles to feed his family. I found him working when I went to university in the mornings, when I came back, and even working at night. Once, I asked him: “But how many hours do you work?” He replied: “Between twelve and fifteen hours a day. Because I have several children to support and I want them to have a better future than mine”.

And so I asked him, “But how much time do you spend with them?” And he answered, “I have to choose, either I stay with them or I bring them food to eat”. Despite this, a well-dressed passer-by said to him, “Go and work, lazy!”. These words seemed to me horrendously cruel and vain. But these words can also be found hidden behind other, more elegant speeches.

Pope Francis gave a prophetic cry against this false idea. And in several conversations, he made me notice: look, they lead us to think that the majority of poor people are poor because they have

no “merit”. It seems that the one who has inherited a lot of goods is more worthy than the one who has worked hard all his life without being able to save anything or even buy a small house.

That is why he stated in *Evangelii gaudium* that this model “does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life” (*EG* 209).

The same question always recurs: are the less gifted not human people? Do the weak not have the same dignity as we do? Must those who are born with fewer opportunities limit themselves merely to surviving? Is there no chance for them to have a job that enables them to grow, to develop, to create something better for their children? The value of our society depends on the answer we give to these questions.

But allow me also to present Pope Francis as a worker. He not only spoke about the value of work, but all his life lived his mission with great effort, passion and commitment. For me, it was always a mystery to understand how he was able to bear such a demanding pace of work, also being an older man with several health problems. He not only worked in the morning with several meetings, audiences, celebrations and encounters, but also all the afternoon. And it seemed to me truly heroic that he summoned the little strength he had in his last days in order to be able to visit a prison.

We cannot take him as an example, because he never took any holidays. In Buenos Aires, in the summer, if you could not find a priest, you could certainly find him. When he was in Argentina he never went out for dinner, to the theatre, to go for a stroll or to see a film; he never took a full day off. Instead, we normal beings could not resist. But his life was a stimulus to live our work generously.

What I want to show, however, is the extent to which he understood that his work was his mission, his daily work was his response to God's love, it was an expression of his concern for the good of others. And for these reasons work itself was his joy, his nourishment, his rest. He experienced what the first reading we heard says: “none of us lives for himself”.

We ask for all workers, who sometimes have to work in unpleasant conditions, that they may find a way to live their work with dignity and hope, and that they may receive compensation that allows them to look forward with hope.

But in this Mass, with the presence of the Vatican Curia, we take into account that we in the Curia also work. Indeed, we are workers who work to a timetable, who perform the tasks assigned to us, who must be responsible, and strive, and make sacrifices in our commitments.

The responsibility of work is also for us, in the Curia, a path of maturation and fulfilment as

Christians.

Finally, allow me to recall Pope Francis' love towards Saint Joseph, that strong and humble worker, that carpenter of a small forgotten village, who with his work took care of Mary and Jesus.

And let us also recall that whenever Pope Francis had a serious problem, he placed a piece of paper with a supplication beneath the image of Saint Joseph. So, let us ask Saint Joseph in heaven to give a warm embrace to our dear Pope Francis.

Holy See Press Office Bulletin, 1 May 2025

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