

opusdei.org

Pope Francis: Encounter with World of Work

"Work is a friend of prayer; work is present every day in the Eucharist, whose gifts are the fruit of man's land and work."

Pope Francis answers 4 questions from a manager, a union representative, a manual worker, and an unemployed person, during his May 27 pastoral visit to Genoa.

05/30/2017

**Question from manager
Ferdinando Garré of the Naval
Repairs district:**

In our work, we find ourselves struggling with so many obstacles – excessive bureaucracy, slowness in public decision-making, lack of services or adequate infrastructure – which often do not allow the best energies of this city to be released. We share this challenging journey with our chaplain and are encouraged by our archbishop, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco. We turn to you, Holiness, to ask for a word of closeness. A word of comfort to encourage us before the obstacles we businessmen come up against every day.

Pope Francis :

Good morning, everyone!

It is the first time I have come to Genoa, and being so close to the port

reminds me of where my father left ... This is very emotional for me. And thank you for your welcome. Mr. Ferdinando Garré: I knew the questions, and for some I wrote down some ideas to respond; and I also keep my pen in my hand to note down something that comes to mind at the time, to answer. But for these questions on the world of work I wanted to think well so as to answer well, because today work is at risk It is a world where work is not considered with the dignity it has and gives. Therefore, I will answer with the things I have thought about, and some that I will say at the time.

First, a premise. The premise is: the world of work is a human priority. It is, therefore, a Christian priority, our priority, and also a priority of the Pope. Because it comes from that first command that God gave to Adam: “Go, till the earth, work the earth, tame it”. There has always

been friendship between the Church and work, starting with a working Jesus. Where there is a worker, there is the interest and the gaze of love of the Lord and of the Church. I think this is clear. It is beautiful that this question that comes from a businessman, an engineer; from his way of speaking about the enterprise, the typical entrepreneur's virtues emerge. And since this question was posed by a businessman, we will talk about them. Creativity, love for your business, passion and pride for the work of the hands and intelligence of yourself and your workers. The businessman is a key figure in any good economy: there is no good economy without a good entrepreneur. There is no good business without good entrepreneurs, without your ability to create, to create jobs, to create products. In your words we also perceive your esteem for the city – and we understand this – for its

economy, the quality of the workers, and also for the environment, the sea ... It is important to recognize the virtues of workers. Their need – workers – is the need to work well so that the job is done well. Sometimes it is thought that a worker works well just because he is paid: this is a serious disrespect towards workers and labour as it denies the dignity of work, which begins precisely in working well for dignity, for honour. The true manager – I will try to make the profile of a good manager – the real manager knows his workers, because he works alongside them, he works with them. Let's not forget that the entrepreneur must be first of all a worker. If he does not have this experience of dignity, he will not be a good manager. He shares the workers' efforts and shares the joys of work, of solving problems together, of creating something together. If and when he has to lay off someone, this is always a painful

decision and he would not do it if possible. No good manager likes to lay off his people – no, he who thinks he can solve the problem of his job by firing people, is not a good entrepreneur, he is a trader, who sells his people today and tomorrow sells his dignity. He always suffers, and sometimes from this suffering new ideas emerge to avoid dismissal. This is the good entrepreneur. I remember, almost a year ago, a little less, at Mass at Santa Marta at 7 am, at the exit I was greeting the people who were there, and a man approached. He was crying. He said, “I came to ask for a grace: I am at the limit and I have to make a statement of bankruptcy. That would mean firing sixty workers, and I do not want to, because I feel like I am firing myself”. And that man was crying. He was a good manager. He fought and prayed for his people because they were “his”: “They are my

family”. They were attached to one another.

A disease of the economy is the progressive transformation of entrepreneurs into speculators. The entrepreneur must not be confused with the speculator: there are two different types. The entrepreneur must not be confused with the speculator: the speculator is a figure similar to what Jesus in the Gospel calls a “mercenary”, as opposed to the Good Shepherd. The speculator does not love his company, he does not love his workers, but sees business and workers only as a means to make a profit. He uses, uses the company and the workers to make a profit. Firing, closing down, moving the company is not a problem to him, because the speculator uses, exploits, “eats” people and means for to reach profit targets. When the economy is inhabited by good entrepreneurs,

businesses are friendly to people and even to the poor. When it falls into the hands of speculators, everything is ruined. With the speculator, the economy loses face and loses its faces. It is a faceless economy. An abstract economy. Behind the speculator's decisions there are no people, and therefore we do not see the people who are to be dismissed and cut out. When the economy loses contact with the faces of concrete people, it itself becomes a faceless economy and therefore a ruthless economy. We must fear the speculators, not the entrepreneurs; no, do not fear businessmen because there are so many good ones! No. Fear speculators. But paradoxically, sometimes the political system seems to encourage those who speculate on work and not those who invest in and believe in the job. Why? Because it creates bureaucracy and controls, starting from the hypothesis that the agents of the economy are

speculators, so those who are not speculators remain disadvantaged, and those who can find the means to circumvent controls and reach their goals. It is known that regulations and laws intended for the dishonest end up penalizing the honest. And today there are so many real entrepreneurs, honest managers who love their workers, who love the company, who work alongside them to carry ahead the business, and these are the most disadvantaged by these policies that favour speculators. But honest and virtuous entrepreneurs go ahead, in the end, despite everything. I like to quote a good phrase of Luigi Einaudi, economist and president of the Italian Republic. He wrote: “Thousands, millions of individuals work, produce and save despite everything we can invent to molest them, to obstruct them, and to discourage them. It is a natural vocation that drives them, not just

the thirst for gain. The taste, the pride of seeing your business thrive, obtain credit, inspire trust in an increasingly broad clientele, expand their factories, are a springboard for progress just as powerful as profit. If that were not the case, it would not be possible to explain why there are entrepreneurs who in their own companies exhaust all their energies and invest all their capital, often earning an income far more modest what they could surely and comfortably obtain with other efforts". They have that mystical love ...

Thank you for what you said, because you are a representative of these entrepreneurs. Be mindful, entrepreneurs, and also you, workers: beware of speculators, also of the rules and laws that in the end favour speculators and not true entrepreneurs. In the end they leave people without work. Thank you.

Question from Micaela, union representative

Today we talk about industry again, thanks to the fourth industrial revolution or “Industry 4.0”. Well: the world of work is ready to accept new productive challenges that bring prosperity. Our concern is that this new technological frontier and the economic and productive recovery that sooner or later will come, will not bring with it new quality employment, but will instead contribute to the rise in precariousness and social hardship. Today, the real revolution would be to transform the word “work” into a concrete form of social redemption.

Pope Francis :

It first came to mind to me to answer with a play of words ... You finished with the word “social redemption” [in Italian – “ riscatto ”], and I think of “social blackmail” [in Italian – “

ricatto ”]. What I am about to say is a real thing that happened in Italy about a year ago. There was a queue of unemployed people applying for a job, an interesting job, in an office. The girl who told me this story – an educated girl, who spoke several languages, which was important for that role – said they had told her “Yes, you can start ...; there will be 10-11 hours a day ...” – “Yes, yes!” she said, immediately, because she needed work – “and it starts with – I think they said, I do not want to make a mistake, but it was no more than 800 euros per month”. And she said, “But ... just eight hundred? For eleven hours?”. And the man – the speculator, he was not a businessman, the employee of the speculator – said to her, “Miss, look at the line of people behind you: if you don’t like it, you can go”. This is not *riscatto* , redemption, but rather *ricatto* , blackmail!

I will now say what I had written, but your last word reminded me of this. Illegal work. Another person told me that he had a job, but from September to June; he was laid off in June and taken on again in October, September. And this is how it goes – illegal work.

I welcomed the proposal to have this meeting today, in a workplace and workers, because these too are places of the people of God. Dialogues in workplaces are no less important than the dialogues we have in parishes or solemn conferences, because the places of the Church are the places of life and therefore also squares and factories. Because someone can say, “But this priest, what does he say to us? Go to the parish!” No, the world of work is the world of the people of God: we are all Church, all people of God. Many of the meetings between God and men, spoken of by the Bible and the

Gospels, occurred while people were working: Moses hears the voice of God calling him, and revealing his name while grazing his father-in-law's flock; Jesus' first disciples were fishermen and were called by Him while working by the lake. It is very true what you say: lack of work is far more than not having a source of income for to live on. Work is also this, but it is much, much more. By working we become a fuller person, our humanity flourishes, young people become adults only by working. The Church's social doctrine has always seen human work as a participation in creation that continues every day, also thanks to the hands, mind and heart of the workers. On Earth there are a few joys greater than those we experience working, just as there are fewer pains greater than those of work, when work exploits, crushes, humiliates, kills. Labour can do great harm because it can do great good.

Work is the friend of man, and man is the friend of work, and for this reason it is not easy to recognize it as an enemy, because presents itself like a person at home, even when it strikes us and hurts us. Men and women are fed through work: by work they are “anointed with dignity”. For this reason, the entire social pact is built around work. This is the core of the problem. Because when you do not work, or you work badly, you work little or you work too much, it is democracy that enters into crisis, and the entire social pact. This is also the meaning of Article 1 of the Italian Constitution, which is very beautiful: “Italy is a democratic republic founded on labour”. On this basis we can say that taking work away from people or exploiting people with work that is unworthy, or poorly-paid or whatever, is unconstitutional. If it were not founded on labour, the Italian Republic would not be a democracy,

because the place of work is occupied and has always been occupied by privileges, castes, and revenues. It is therefore necessary to look without fear, but with responsibility, to the technological transformations of the economy and life, and not to be resigned to the ideology that is gaining ground everywhere, that imagines a world where only half or maybe two-thirds of the workers will work, and the others will be maintained by social subsidies. It must be clear that the real goal to reach is not that of “income for all” but rather, “work for all”. Because without work, without work for all, there will be no dignity for all. The work of today and that of tomorrow will be different, perhaps very different – we think of the industrial revolution, there has been a change; here too there will be a revolution – it will be different from yesterday’s work, but it will have to be work, not pension, not retirement:

work. One retires at the right age, it is an act of justice; but it goes against the dignity of the person to put them in retirement at the age of 35 or 40 years, to give them state benefits, and say, “get by”. “But do I have enough to eat?” Yes. “Can I support my family, with this check?” Yes. “Do I have dignity?” No! Why? Because I do not work. Today’s work will be different. Without work, you can survive; but to live, you need work. The choice is between surviving and living. And there needs to be work for everyone. For young people ... Do you know the percentage of young people aged 25 and under, unemployed, in Italy? I will not say it: look for the statistics. And this is a debt on the future. Because these young people grow up without dignity, because they are not “united” by the labour that gives dignity. But the cornerstone of this question is this: a monthly cheque, a monthly allowance that enables you to

support a family does not solve the problem. The problem must be resolved with work for everyone. I think I have answered more or less ...

Question from Sergio, a worker on a training course promoted by the Chaplains

Not infrequently in the workplace, competition, career, and economic aspects prevail, but work is a privileged occasion for witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel, lived by adopting attitudes of brotherhood, collaboration, and solidarity. We ask your Holiness for advice on how to journey better toward these ideals.

Pope Francis :

The values of work are changing very fast, and many of these new values of large businesses and big finance are not values in line with the human dimension or, therefore, with Christian humanism. The

emphasis on competition within the company, besides being an anthropological and Christian error, is also an economic mistake as it neglects the fact that the business is first of all cooperation, mutual assistance, and reciprocity. When a business scientifically creates a system of individual incentives that put workers in competition with each other, perhaps an advantage can be gained in the short term, but it soon ends up undermining that fabric of trust that is the soul of any organization. And so, when a crisis arises, the company unravels and implodes, because there is no longer any rope to hold it together. It must be said strongly that this competitive culture among workers within a business is a mistake, and is therefore a vision that needs to be changed if we want the good of enterprise, workers and the economy. Another “value” that is actually a disvalue is the so-called

“meritocracy”. Meritocracy is very appealing because it uses a beautiful word: “merit”; but since it is exploited and used ideologically, it is distorted and perverted. Meritocracy, beyond the good faith of the many who invoke it, is becoming a way of ethically legitimizing inequality. The new capitalism, through meritocracy, gives a moral appearance to inequality because it interprets the talents of people not as a gift: talent is not a gift according to this interpretation: it is a merit, determining a system of cumulative advantages and disadvantages. Thus, if two children are born differently in terms of talent or social and economic opportunities, the economic world will interpret the different talents as merits and will pay them otherwise. And so, when those two children retire, the inequality between them will be multiplied. A second consequence of the so-called “meritocracy” is the

change of the culture of poverty. The poor person is considered undeserving and therefore to blame. And if poverty is the fault of the poor, the rich are exonerated from doing anything. This is the old logic of Job's friends, who wanted to convince him that he was guilty of his misfortune. But this is not the logic of the Gospel, it is not the logic of life: meritocracy in the Gospel is instead found in the figure of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He despises his younger brother and thinks he must remain a failure because he deserves it; instead the father thinks no son deserves the acorns that are for the pigs.

Question from Vittoria, unemployed

We unemployed feel that the Institutions are not only distant, but like stepmothers, more intent on

passive assistance than committing themselves to creating the conditions favourable to work. We are comforted by the human warmth with which the Church is close to us and the welcome that each one of us finds at the house of the Chaplains. Your Holiness, where can we find the strength to continue to believe, and never to give up despite all this?

Pope Francis :

That's it! Those who lose their job and can not find another good job, feels that they lose their dignity, just as those who are forced by necessity to accept bad or unsuitable jobs. Not all jobs are good: there is still too much bad work without dignity, in the illegal trafficking of weapons, pornography, gambling and all those businesses that do not respect the rights of workers or nature. How bad is the work of those who are paid a lot because they do not have

timetables, limits, boundaries between work and life because the job becomes the entire life. A paradox of our society is the presence of a growing share of people who would like to work but are not able to, and others who work too hard, who would like to work less but are unable to because they have been “bought” by businesses. Work, on the other hand, becomes “brother work” when alongside it there is the time for non-work, feast days. Slaves do not have free time: without the feast day, work becomes slavery, even if well-paid; and in order to feast, we have to work. In families where there is unemployment, it is never really Sunday and festivities sometimes become sad days because work is lacking on Monday. To celebrate the feast, you need to celebrate labour. One marks the time and rhythm of the other. They go together.

I also believe that consumption is an idol of our time. Consumption is the centre of our society, and therefore also the pleasure that consumption promises. Grand shops, open twenty-four hours a day, every day, new “temples” that promise salvation, eternal life; cults of pure consumption and therefore of pure pleasure. This is also the root of the labour crisis in our society: work is fatigue, sweat. The Bible knew it very well and reminds us of it. But a hedonistic society, that sees and wants only consumption, does not understand the value of fatigue and sweat and therefore does not understand labour. All idolatries are experiences of pure consumption: idols do not work. Work is labour: there are pains in the generation of joy for what has been generated together. Without regaining a culture that values fatigue and sweat, we will not find a new relationship with work and we will continue to dream

of the consumption of pure pleasure. Work is the centre of every social pact: it is not a means for consumption, no. It is the centre of every social pact. Between work and consumption there are so many things, all important and beautiful, called dignity, respect, honour, freedom, rights, rights of all, women, children, children, the elderly ... If we sell out labour for consumption, with work we will soon sell out these accompanying words: dignity, respect, honour, freedom. We must not allow this, and we must continue to ask for work, to generate it, to estimate it, to love it. We must also pray for it: many of the most beautiful prayers of our parents and grandparents were prayers of work, learned and recited before, after, and during work. Work is a friend of prayer; work is present every day in the Eucharist, whose gifts are the fruit of man's land and work. A world that no longer knows the

values, and the value, of work does not understand the Eucharist either, the true and humble prayer of workers and workers. The fields, the sea, factories have always been “altars” from which beautiful and pure prayers have been raised, which God has received and gathered. Prayers said and recited by those who knew and wanted to pray, but also prayers said with the hands, with sweat, with the fatigue of work by those who did not know how to pray with their mouth. God has also welcomed them and continues to welcome them today too.

For this reason, I would like to end this dialogue with a prayer: it is an ancient prayer, the “Come, Holy Spirit” which is also a prayer for work and for work.

“Come, Holy Spirit,
send forth the heavenly radiance of
your light.

Come, father of the poor,

Father of workers.

Come, giver of gifts,

come, light of the heart.

Greatest comforter,

sweet guest of the soul,

sweet consolation.

In labour, rest,

in heat, temperance,

in tears, solace.

Cleanse that which is unclean,

water that which is dry,

heal that which is wounded.

Bend that which is inflexible,

fire that which is chilled,

correct what goes astray.

Grant the reward of virtue,
grant the deliverance of salvation,
grant eternal joy.

Amen”.

Thank you!

And now, I ask the Lord to bless you all, to bless all workers, businessmen, the unemployed. Each one of us, think of the entrepreneurs who do everything to give work; think of the unemployed, think of workers. And may this blessing descend upon all of us and all of them.

[Blessing] Many thanks!

[Courtesy of the Vatican Press Office]

pdf | document generated
automatically from [https://opusdei.org/
en-za/article/pope-francis-encounter-
with-the-world-of-work/](https://opusdei.org/en-za/article/pope-francis-encounter-with-the-world-of-work/) (04/06/2025)