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Audience with the participants in the National Convention of the Italian Federation of Masters of Labour

At 11.45 today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the national Convention of the Italian Federation of Masters of Labour, taking place in Rome from 14 to 17 June 2018.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

Good morning, and welcome. I am glad to meet you on the occasion of your national Convention, which represents a valuable opportunity for sharing, as well as reflection on some issues that are fundamental to our society and our world.

You have made an important contribution as Italian Masters of Labour, and following different paths, to the growth of a more inclusive and dignified social context for all. Your Federation represents in this sense an example of commitment and service to the common good. Aside from this, given the solemn public recognition received by each one of your members, this bears the weight of greater responsibility, and the duty of constant and tireless dedication.

Even since the historical Encyclical *Rerum novarum* of Pope Leo XIII, the social doctrine of the Church has placed labour at the centre of the questions relating to society. Labour at the centre. Work is indeed at the heart of the very vocation given by God to man, of prolonging his creative action and achieving, through his free initiative and judgement, dominion over the other creatures, which translates not into despotic enslavement, but into harmony and respect.

We are called to contemplate the beauty of this divine plan, which is founded on concord between human beings and with other living beings and nature. At the same time, we look with concern at the current condition of humanity and of creation, which is deeply marked by the signs of sin, signs of enmity, selfishness, and blind self-privilege. How many people still remain excluded from economic progress! How many of our brothers suffer because they are crushed by violence and war, or by the degradation of the natural environment! How many, still, are oppressed by the marginality to which they are relegated, and suffer from the lack of positive prospects for the future, and therefore of hope!

May we never be left passive or indifferent by the weakness and the suffering that touch so many people, but rather become increasingly able to recognize them in the faces of the brothers, to try to alleviate them. That we are ever more solicitous in trying to make, to those who have lost it, the hope it needs to live; in fact, it represents, in some way, the first and most fundamental human right of young people first of all. The right to hope, that hope cancelled out today for many people... The first human right: the right to hope.

The hope for a better future always starts from one's own activity and initiative, then from one's work, and never from the material means available. There is in fact no economic security, nor any form of welfare, that is able to ensure fullness of life and personal fulfilment. One can not be happy without the possibility of offering one's own contribution, small or large as it may be, to the construction of the common good. Every person can give his contribution – indeed he must! – so as not to become passive, or to feel extraneous to social life.

For this reason, a society that is not based on work, that does not promote it concretely, and that does not care about those who are excluded from it, would condemn itself to atrophy and to the multiplication of inequalities. On the contrary, a society that, in a subsidiary spirit, seeks to realize the potential of every woman and every man, of every origin and age, will truly breathe deeply, and will be able to overcome the greatest obstacles, drawing from an almost inexhaustible human capital, and putting each person in a position of becoming the creator of his or her own destiny, in accordance with God's plan. Making oneself creators: that "artisanal" dimension of the development of one's own life, that personal dimension of work.

In the debate of these days at the Conference, you have linked the theme of work to the very rich Italian environmental, artistic and cultural heritage, which represents the country's most precious common good. The treasures of the past, in fact, live on through time thanks to the care of those to whom they are entrusted, and the unparalleled heritage of art and culture in Italy constitutes a unique potential, to be put to good use with prudent policies and long-term strategies. So it is up to you, Masters of Labour, to take on the moral and civil task of spreading, promoting and increasing the care of the "Bel Paese" (see F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, CXLVI, v. 13).

In pursuing this goal, the moral question emerges as primary. It is rightly placed at the centre of the life of the Foundation, which is inspired by the values of "correctness, responsibility and transparency" (Code of Ethics, Art.1), and aims to live, witness and spread these same principles throughout the social context, especially that of work. Renewing labour in an ethical sense means in fact renewing the whole of society, banishing fraud and lies which poison the market, civil coexistence and the lives of people, especially the weakest.

In order to do this, in order to witness human and evangelical values in every context and in every circumstance, a tendency towards consistency in one's life is necessary. Consistency in life, and harmony in one's own life. We need to conceive of the whole of our life "as a mission" (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 23): a harmonious mission.

Only with this oblation spirit, only if love for brothers burns us inside like a "spiritual fuel" – which, unlike fossil fuels, is not depleted but rather multiplies with use – will our testimony truly be effective, and capable of enflaming, through charity, all our world. "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (*Lk* 12: 49). Today we are entrusted with this flame; we are given the Spirit of the Lord, Spirit of strength, of involvement, of holiness and mercy: "Now is the time of God's favour!" (*2 Cor* 6: 2).

May the Beatitudes of Jesus in the Gospel guide us along this arduous but exciting journey (cf. *Mt* 5: 3-11,

Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 67-94); may they lead us to look always with love to Jesus Himself who incarnated them in His person; may they show us that holiness does not concern the spirit alone, but also the feet, so that we go towards our brothers, and the hands, so as to share with them. May they teach us and our world not to distrust or leave at the mercy of the waves those who leave their land hungry for bread and justice; may they lead us not to live for the superfluous, but to spend ourselves for the development of all, and to bow with compassion to the weakest. Without the comfortable illusion that, from the rich table of the few, wellbeing might “rain” automatically upon everyone. This is not true.

I wish you a profitable journey as an association, and above all I wish you well in your work. I ask you, please, also to pray for me, and I invoke God’s blessing on you and your family. Thank you.
