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Audience with a delegation of businesspeople from France

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of businesspeople from France.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I am pleased to receive you on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome on the theme of the common good. I thank Msgr. Dominique Rey for his kind words. I find it very good and courageous that, in today's world often marked by individualism, indifference and even the marginalization of the most vulnerable people, some entrepreneurs and business leaders have service to all at heart, and not only private interests or those of restricted circles. I do not doubt that this constitutes a challenge for you. Therefore, I would like to share with you some teachings of the Gospel, which may help you perform your role as leaders in accordance with the heart of God. I will take two pairs of concepts that appear as if they ought to be in tension, but which the Christian, with the help of grace, may unify in his or her own life: ideal and reality, authority and service.

Ideal and reality. A few days ago I mentioned that "collision", that shock, which every Christian often experiences, between the ideal he dreams of and the reality he encounters. I did so with reference to the Virgin Mary in front of the manger in Bethlehem: she who is forced to give birth to the Son of God in the poverty of a stable (cf. *Homily 1 January 2022*): "We hope that everything will be all right and then, like a bolt from the blue, an unexpected problem arises. Our expectations clash painfully with reality" (*ibid.*).

The pursuit of the common good is for you a cause for concern, an ideal, in the context of your professional responsibilities. The common good is therefore certainly a decisive element in your discernment and in your choices as leaders, but it has to reckon with the obligations imposed by the economic and financial systems

currently in place, which often make a mockery of the evangelical principles of social justice and charity. And I imagine that, at times, your task weighs on you, that your conscience comes into conflict when the ideal of justice and the common good that you would like to achieve has not been realised, and that the harsh reality presents itself to you as a lack, a setback, a remorse, a shock.

It is important that you can overcome this, and live it in faith, so as to be able to persevere and not to be discouraged. Faced with the “scandal of the manger”, Mary was not discouraged; she did not rebel, but rather she reacted by keeping it and meditating it in her heart, demonstrating a mature faith, that is strengthened in trial. To *keep* is to accept, despite the darkness and in humility the things that are difficult to accept, that we did not want, that we could not prevent; not to try to disguise or superficially make life seem better, to escape our responsibilities. And to *meditate* is, in prayer, to unify the good and bad things that make up life, to grasp better the interconnection and meaning from God's perspective (cf. *ibid.*).

The second dualism is *authority and service*. When the Apostles argue among themselves about who is the greatest, Jesus intervenes: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (*Mt 9: 35*). The mission of the Christian leader resembles, in many respects, that of the shepherd, of which Jesus is the model, and who knows how to go ahead of the flock to show the way, to stay in its midst to see what is happened, and also to stay behind the others, to make sure that no-one loses touch. I have often urged priests and bishops to have “the odour of the sheep”, to immerse themselves in the reality of those who are entrusted to them, to know them, to be close to them. I think that this advice is valid also for you! Therefore, I encourage you to be close to those who cooperate with you at all levels: to take an interest in their lives, to be aware of their difficulties, their sufferings, their troubles, but also their joys, their plans, their hopes.

To exercise authority as service requires that you share it. Here too, Jesus is our teacher, when he sends the disciples on their mission, giving them the same authority as him (see *Mt 28: 13-20*). You are invited to implement subsidiarity, “respecting everyone’s autonomy and capacity to take initiative, especially that of the least. All the parts of a body are necessary, and ... those that may seem the weakest and least important, in reality are the most necessary” (General Audience, 23 September 2020). In this way, the Christian manager is called to consider carefully the place assigned to all people in his company, included those whose tasks may seem of minor importance, because everyone is important in God’s eyes. Although the exercise of authority requires us to take courageous decisions, sometimes in the first person, subsidiarity allows each person to give the best of himself, to feel that he is participating, to bear his share of responsibility and thus contribute to the good of the whole.

I realise how demanding the Gospel can be and how difficult it is to implement in a competitive professional world. However, I invite you to keep your eyes on Jesus Christ, with your life of prayer and the offering of your daily work. On the cross, he experienced loving to the very end, carrying out his mission to the point of giving his life. You too have your crosses to bear. But be confident: he promised to accompany us “to the close of the age” (*Mt 28:20*). Do not hesitate to invoke the Holy Spirit, that he may guide your decisions. The Church needs your witness.

I thank you, and I bless you. And do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.
