



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE DIRECTORS AND MEMBERS OF "CONFARTIGIANATO"
AN ASSOCIATION OF ITALIAN ARTISANS**

Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 31 March 2007

Dear Friends,

I am particularly pleased with your visit and I address my cordial greeting to each one of you. I greet in particular your President, Mr Giorgio Natalino Guerrini, and thank him for his courteous and profound words to me on behalf of all. I extend my respectful thoughts to the other directors and members of your Confederation, which is now more than 60 years old, years rich with intense activity.

Confartigianato was founded in 1946 on the principle of free enrolment open to every geographical, sectorial and cultural member of entrepreneurial activity and small artisan businesses. There is no doubt that it has helped to build the modern Italian Nation. It has characterized certain important aspects of the Nation's development in society and economics, art and culture, and has impressed its own stylistic code upon Italian progress.

Indeed, if until a few decades ago, craftwork evoked something "old-fashioned" and "picturesque", to be associated with the image of the locksmith or the cobbler's workshop, today instead it stands for autonomy, creativity and personalization in the production of goods and services.

Dear friends, your presence offers me the opportunity to reflect on an important aspect of human experience. I am referring to the reality of work, which in this age is in the midst of tremendous economic and social changes that are increasingly rapid and complex.

In the Bible, the authentic meaning of human work is highlighted in various passages. To start with Genesis, we read that the Creator made man in his image and likeness and invited him to cultivate

the earth (cf. Gn 2: 5-6).

Work is consequently inherent in man's original condition. Unfortunately, because of our first parents' sin it became an effort and a penalty (cf. Gn 3: 6-8), but in the divine plan its value has remained unchanged.

And the Church, faithful to God's Word, does not cease to recall the principle: "Work is "for man" and not man "for work" (*Laborem Exercens*, n. 6). Thus, she ceaselessly proclaims the primacy of man over the work of his hands and recalls that it must all be oriented to the true progress of the human person and the common good: capital, science, technology, public resources and even private ownership.

This has been felicitously achieved in the craftwork businesses you represent, which are inspired by the Gospel teachings and the principles of the Church's social doctrine.

I would like here to recall what the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* says in this regard: "Work in small and medium-sized businesses, the work of artisans and independent work can represent an occasion to make the actual work experience more human, both in terms of the possibility of establishing positive personal relationships in smaller-sized communities and in terms of the opportunities for greater initiative and industriousness" (n. 315).

Dear artisans, on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, my Predecessor John Paul II addressed some significant words to you which have retained the same timeliness and urgency. Today, I would like to present them once again to the whole of Confartigianato: "You can give new strength and practical expression to those values which have always marked your activity: quality, a spirit of initiative, the promotion of artistic skills, freedom and cooperation, the correct relationship between technology and the environment, devotion to family, good neighbourly relations.

"In the past", he added, "the culture of crafts has created great occasions for bringing people together and has bequeathed wonderful syntheses of culture and faith to later generations" (*Teachings of John Paul II*, 2000, vol. 1, p. 372).

Dear friends, continue with tenacity and perseverance to preserve and put to good use the productive craft culture that can give life to important opportunities for balanced financial progress and encounters between men and peoples.

Furthermore, may you as Christians be committed to living and testifying to the "Gospel of work", in the awareness that the Lord calls all the baptized to holiness through their daily occupations. Josemaría Escrivá, a Saint of our times, notes in this regard that since Christ who worked as a craftsman took it into his hands, "work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not

only is it the background of man's life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies" (*Christ Is Passing By*, Homily, n. 47).

May the Virgin Mary, who lived in hardworking concealment, and St Joseph, Patron of the Church and your special Protector, help you in this task which becomes a precious service to evangelization. At the school of the Family of Nazareth you can learn how to join more easily a coherent life of faith with the efforts and difficulties of work, personal profit and the commitment to solidarity for the needy.

As I renew to you the expression of my gratitude for your visit, I assure you of a special remembrance in prayer for each one of you and for your various activities, and I cordially bless you together with your loved ones.

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