



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND PERSONNEL
OF ENAC (NATIONAL AGENCY FOR CIVIL AVIATION)
AND ENAV (NATIONAL AGENCY FOR FLIGHT ASSISTANCE)***

Paul VI Audience Hall

Saturday, 20 February 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am glad to greet you and to address my cordial welcome to all of you who represent the variegated world of Italian civil aviation. I greet respectfully the Civil and Military Authorities, with a special thought for Senator Altero Matteoli, Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, and Prof. Vito Riggio, President of ENAC, whom I thank for his courteous words. I greet Dr Gianni Letta, Undersecretary of the Office of the Prime Minister, who has deigned to be present at this important meeting. Lastly, I address my thoughts to the directors and all the operators of ENAC, ENAV and the other bodies that make up the civil aviation system.

In the past century, the frontiers of mobility were enormously expanded by the ever more frequent use of aeroplanes. Today the skies increasingly represent what we might call the "highways" of modern viability, and airports have consequently become the privileged crossroads of the global village; as has been said, millions of people pass through them every day. To you and to the bodies you represent are entrusted the management and the ever more complex organization of this structure of contemporary life and communication among persons and peoples. Your work is often discreet and little known; it is not always noticed by the users. However it does not escape the eyes of God, who sees human efforts even when they are hidden (cf. Mt 6: 6).

The tasks entrusted to you are truly noteworthy! You are called to regulate and to control air traffic and to provide for the efficiency of the national transport system, with respect for the country's international commitments. You must guarantee safe flights to individuals and businesses, as well as the protection of their rights, the quality of services at the stopovers, and fair competition with

respect for the environment. In all these commitments it is important to remember that in every project and activity the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity (cf. Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 25). In fact the person must not be the means but rather the end for which to strive constantly. St Ambrose reminds us that "man is the summit and, as it were, compendium of the universe and the supreme beauty of Creation" (*Exameron IX*, 75). Respect for these principles may appear particularly complicated and difficult in today's context. This is because of the economic crisis that is giving rise to problematic effects in the sector of civil aviation and because of the threat of international terrorism that also targets airports and aircraft in order to carry out its subversive plots. In this situation too one must never lose sight of respect for the primacy of the person and attention to his or her needs. This does not make the service any less efficient or penalize financial management; on the contrary, it constitutes an important guarantee of true efficacy and authentic quality.

Today's airport is increasingly appearing as a mirror of the world and a "place" of humanity where people of diverse nationalities, cultures and religions meet. Millions of passengers pass through airports every year, bound for holiday or work destinations or to join relatives in order to share happy or sorrowful events with them. Many on pilgrimage travel by air seeking moments of spirituality and an experience of God. Moreover, in recent years airports have become places where migrants and refugees experience the trial of waiting, with hope and fear for their future. In addition, the number of children and of the elderly, the disabled and the sick who require special care and attention is ever increasing. In the last few decades, also for the Successor of Peter, the aeroplane has become an indispensable means of evangelization. How can we forget the place that airports and aeroplanes have occupied in Apostolic Journeys, my own and those of my Venerable Predecessors? I cannot but thank you all for this precious service!

Furthermore the Church reserves special pastoral care for the world of Civil Aviation. Indeed, as Venerable Pope John Paul II recalled, thinking precisely of your milieu, so varied and complex: "How greatly they want to see a friendly face, hear a soothing word, receive an act of kindness or concrete understanding!" (*Homily at Mass for the Feast of Our Lady of Loreto*, Leonardo da Vinci Airport, Fiumicino, 10 Dec. 1991; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 16 Dec. 1991, p. 23). The Christian community responds to these needs with the service provided by airport chapels and chaplains. They are mainly for both flight and land personnel, for police, customs and security officials as well as for medical and paramedical staff, but they are also for the use of all who pass through the airport. This presence reminds us that every person has a transcendent, spiritual dimension and helps people recognize that they belong to one family, made up of members who are not merely beside each other but who, through their relations with others and with God, build brotherly solidarity on the basis of justice and peace (cf. Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, nn. 53-54).

Dear friends, on 24 March 1920, my Predecessor *Benedict XV*, of venerable memory, crowning the wish of several pioneers in aviation, proclaimed Our Lady of Loreto Patroness of all air

navigators with reference to the Archangel Gabriel, who came down from Heaven to bring Mary the glad tidings of her Divine Motherhood (cf. Lk 1: 26-28) and to the devout tradition linked to the Holy House. I entrust your work and all your projects to Our Lady of Loreto. May she help you seek always and in all things God's "Kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6: 33). May the Apostolic Blessing which I warmly impart to each one of you and to your loved ones go with you.

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