News
Vatican
Francis, the comic strip
Migrant laborers work at a construction site in Doha, Qatar, March 26, 2016. (CNS photo/Nase

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**VATICAN CITY — ** Companies, especially those in the construction sector, must guarantee safety in the workplace to protect the rights and dignity of their workers, Pope Francis said.

"Last year, there were many, too many, deaths in the workplace. They are not numbers, they are people," the pope said Jan. 20 during a meeting with members of the Italian National Association of Building Contractors.

"Unfortunately, if you look at workplace safety as a cost, you are starting from the wrong assumption. The real wealth is the people," he said.

According to its website, the association was founded in Naples in 1949 after the fall of fascism, "to promote policies that combine the entrepreneurial skills of the construction sector with the interests and needs of civil society."

Congratulating them on their 75th anniversary, the pope acknowledged the difficulty many have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but he emphasized the importance of continuing to draw on the founding principles of their association.

The Gospels can also be a source of inspiration on the values of "healthy competition and transparency, responsibility and sustainability, as well as ethics, legality and safety," he said.

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Recalling Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders, the pope said the one who built his house on a solid foundation is an example of those who do not limit themselves "to appearing outwardly Christian but work effectively as a Christian" who is strong in both good times and in bad.

"Faith does not protect us from bad weather," he said. "However, accompanied by good works, it strengthens us and makes us capable of enduring it."

While competition is an important part of doing business, the pope said, "healthy" competition is only possible when there is respect for one's employees and for one's competitors.

When the goal becomes eliminating a competitor, he said, "the social fabric of trust that allows the market to work properly is jeopardized."

"Competition must be an incentive to do better and good, not the will to dominate and exclude," he continued. "This is why transparency in decision-making processes and economic choices is fundamental."

Pope Francis also called on the association and its members to practice responsibility and ensure sustainability by using materials that protect people and the environment.

Lastly, ethics and safety in the workplace acknowledge the importance of workers and recognize them as "the real wealth" because "without them there is no working

community, there is no business, there is no economy."

"Working safely allows everyone to express the best of themselves by earning their daily bread," the pope said. "The more we take care of the dignity of work, the more we are certain that the quality and beauty of the works created will increase."