



The Holy See

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

JUBILEE OF WORKERS

Monday, 1 May 2000

1. *"Lord, give success to the work of our hands"* (Responsorial Psalm).

These words we repeated in the Responsorial Psalm clearly express the meaning of today's Jubilee. Today, 1 May, a united prayer rises from the vast and multifaceted world of work: Lord, bless us and strengthen the work of our hands!

Our labours - at home, in the fields, in industries and in offices - could turn into an exhausting busyness ultimately devoid of meaning (cf. *Eccl 1: 3*). Let us ask the Lord for it to be the fulfilment of his plan, so that our work may recover *its original meaning*.

And what is the original meaning of work? We have heard it in the first reading from the Book of Genesis. God gave man, created in his image and likeness, a command: "Fill the earth and subdue it" (*Gn 1: 28*). The Apostle Paul echoes these words when he writes to the Christians of Thessalonica: "When we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat", and exhorts them "to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living" (*2 Thes 3: 10, 12*).

In God's plan, work is therefore seen as a right and duty. Necessary to make the earth's resources benefit the life of each person and of society, it helps to direct human activity towards God in the fulfilment of his command to "subdue the earth". In this regard another of the Apostle's exhortations echoes in our souls: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (*1 Cor 10: 31*).

2. While the Jubilee year turns our gaze to the mystery of the Incarnation, it invites us to reflect

with particular intensity on the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth. It was there that he spent most of his earthly life. With his silent diligence in Joseph's workshop, Jesus gave the highest proof of the dignity of work. Today's Gospel mentions how the residents of Nazareth, his fellow villagers, welcomed him with surprise, asking one another: "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Mt 13: 54-55).

The Son of God did not disdain being called a "carpenter" and did not want to be spared the normal condition of every human being. "The eloquence of the life of Christ is unequivocal: he belongs to the 'working world', he has appreciation and respect for human work. It can indeed be said that he looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father" (Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, n. 26).

The teaching of the Apostles and of the Church derives from Christ's Gospel; *a true and proper Christian spirituality of work* flows from it and was eminently expressed in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (nn. 33-39 and 63-72). After centuries of heated social and ideological tensions, the contemporary world, ever more interdependent, needs this "*Gospel of work*" so that human activity can promote the authentic development of individuals and of all humanity.

3. Dear brothers and sisters who today represent this entire working world gathered for this Jubilee celebration, what does the Jubilee say to you? What does the Jubilee say to society, for which work is not only a fundamental structure but also a proving ground for its choices of value and culture?

Since its Hebrew origins, *the Jubilee has directly concerned the reality of work*, since the People of God were a people of free men and women redeemed by the Lord from their condition as slaves (cf. Lv 25). In the paschal mystery Christ also brings to fulfilment this institution of the old law, giving it full spiritual meaning but integrating its social dimension into the great plan of the kingdom, which, like "leaven", causes the whole of society to make true progress.

Therefore the Jubilee Year calls for *a rediscovery of the meaning and value of work*. It is also an invitation to address the economic and social imbalances in the world of work by re-establishing the right hierarchy of values, giving priority to the dignity of working men and women and to their freedom, responsibility and participation. It also spurs us to redress situations of injustice by safeguarding each people's culture and different models of development.

At this moment I cannot fail to express my solidarity with all who are suffering because of unemployment, inadequate wages or lack of material resources. I am well aware of the peoples who are reduced to a poverty that offends their dignity, prevents them from sharing the earth's goods and obliges them to eat whatever scraps fall from the tables of the rich (cf. *Incarnationis*

mysterium, n. 12). The effort to remedy these situations is a labour of justice and peace.

The new realities that are having such a powerful impact on the productive process, such as the globalization of finance, economics, trade and labour, must never violate the dignity and centrality of the human person, nor the freedom and democracy of peoples. If solidarity, participation and the possibility to manage these radical changes are not the solution, they are certainly the necessary ethical guarantee so that individuals and peoples do not become tools but the protagonists of their future. All this can be achieved and, since it is possible, it becomes a duty.

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is reflecting on these themes and is closely following developments in the world's economic and social situation, in order to study their effects on the human being. The result of this reflection will be the *Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church*, which is now being compiled.

4. Dear workers, our meeting is illumined by *the figure of Joseph of Nazareth* and by his spiritual and moral stature, as lofty as it is humble and discreet. The promise of the Psalm is fulfilled in him: "Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.... Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord" (127: 1-2, 4). The Guardian of the Redeemer taught Jesus the carpenter's trade, but above all he set him the most valuable example of what Scripture calls the "fear of God", the very beginning of wisdom, which consists in religious submission to him and in the deep desire to seek and always carry out his will. This, dear friends, is the true source of blessing for every person, for every family and for every nation.

I entrust all of you, your Jubilee and your families to St Joseph, a worker and just man, and to his most holy wife, Mary.

"Lord, give success to the work of our hands".

Bless, O Lord of the centuries and the millennia, the daily work by which men and women provide bread for themselves and their loved ones. We also offer to your fatherly hands the toil and sacrifices associated with work, in union with your Son Jesus Christ, who redeemed human work from the yoke of sin and restored it to its original dignity.

To you be praise and glory today and for ever. Amen.

