



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF THE AGRICULTURAL WORLD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 12 November 2000

1. *"The Lord keeps faith forever" (Ps 146: 6).*

It is precisely in order to sing of this fidelity of the Lord recalled just now in the Responsorial Psalm that you are here for your Jubilee today, dear brothers and sisters. I am therefore delighted with your beautiful witness, which was expressed a few moments ago by Bishop Fernando Charrier, whom I cordially thank. A respectful greeting also goes to the dignitaries who have wished to show their participation as representatives of various States and especially of the United Nations Organizations and Offices for Food and Agriculture.

My thoughts turn next to the directors and members of the National Farmers' Confederation and the other farmers' organizations present here, as well as to the members of the bakers' federations, of the food and agro-industrial cooperatives and of the Forest Union of Italy. Your presence here in such numbers and variety, dear brothers and sisters, gives us a vivid sense of the unity of the human family and of the universal dimension of our prayer addressed to the one God, Creator of the universe and faithful to man.

2. *God's faithfulness!* For you, people of the agricultural world, it is a daily experience, constantly repeated in the observation of nature. You know the language of the soil and the seeds, of the grass and the trees, of the fruit and the flowers. In the most varied landscapes, from the harshness of the mountains to the irrigated plains under the most varied skies, this language has its own fascination which you know so well. In this language, you see God's fidelity to what he said on the third day of creation: "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit (*Gn* 1: 11). In the movement of nature, which is calm and silent but full of life, the original pleasure of the Creator is still vibrant: "And God saw that it was a good thing"! (*Gn* 1: 12).

Yes, *the Lord keeps faith for ever*. And you, experts in this language of fidelity - a language that is ancient but ever new - are naturally people of gratitude. Your prolonged contact with the wonder of the earth's products lets you see them as an inexhaustible gift of divine Providence. This is why your annual day is "thanksgiving day" *par excellence*. This year it has an even higher spiritual value since it is occurring during the Jubilee which celebrates the 2,000th anniversary of Christ's birth.

You have come to give thanks for the fruits of the earth, but first of all to acknowledge him as the Creator and, at the same time, the most beautiful fruit of our earth, the "fruit" of Mary's womb, the Saviour of humanity and, in a certain sense, of the "cosmos" itself. Indeed, creation, as Paul says, "has been groaning in travail" and cherishes the hope of being set free "from its bondage to decay" (*Rom 8: 21-22*).

3. The "groaning" of the earth prompts us to think of your work, dear men and women of agriculture, *work that is so important and yet not free from discomfort and hardship*. The passage we heard from the Book of Kings recalls a typical situation of suffering due to drought. The prophet Elijah, exhausted from hunger and thirst, is both the agent and the beneficiary of a miracle of generosity. It fell to a young widow to rescue him, sharing with him her last handful of flour and the last drops of her oil; her generosity touches God's heart, to the point that the prophet can say: "The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth".

The culture of the farming world has always been *marked by a sense of impending risk to the harvest*, due to unforeseeable climatic misfortunes. However, in addition to the traditional burdens, there are often others *due to human carelessness*. Agricultural activity in our era has had to reckon with the consequences of industrialization and the sometimes disorderly development of urban areas, with the phenomenon of air pollution and ecological disruption, with the dumping of toxic waste and deforestation. Christians, while always trusting in the help of Providence, must make responsible efforts to ensure that the value of the earth is respected and promoted.

Agricultural work should be better and better organized and supported by social measures that fully reward the toil it involves and the truly great usefulness that characterizes it. If the world of the most refined technology is not reconciled with the simple language of nature in a healthy balance, human life will face ever greater risks, of which we are already seeing the first disturbing signs.

4. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, be grateful to the Lord, but at the same time be *proud of the task that your work assigns to you*. Work in such a way that you resist the temptations of a productivity and profit that are detrimental to the respect for nature. God entrusted the earth to human beings "to till it and keep it" (cf. *Gn 2: 15*). When this principle is forgotten and they become the tyrants rather than the custodians of nature, sooner or later the latter will rebel.

But you understand clearly, dear friends, that this principle of order, which applies to agricultural work as well as to every other area of human activity, is rooted in the human heart. *The "heart" itself is therefore the first ground to be cultivated.* It was not by chance that, when Jesus wanted to explain the work of God's word, he used the parable of the sower as an illuminating example taken from the farming world. God's word is a seed meant to bear abundant fruit, but unfortunately it often falls on unsuitable ground, where stones or weeds and thorns - various terms for our sins - prevent it from taking root and growing (cf. *Mt 13: 13-23, par.*). Thus, a Father of the Church gives the following advice precisely to a farmer: "So when you are in the field and are looking at your farm, consider that you too are Christ's field and devote attention to yourself as you do to your field. The same beauty that you require your peasant to give to your field, give to God in the cultivation of your heart ..." (St Paulinus of Nola, *Letter 39, 3 to Aper and Amanda*).

It is because of this "cultivation of the spirit" that you are here to celebrate the Jubilee today. You present to the Lord, even before your professional efforts, the daily work of purifying your heart: a demanding task, which we will never succeed in doing on our own. Our strength is Christ, who, as the Letter to the Hebrews just reminded us, "appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (*Heb 9: 26*).

5. This sacrifice, offered once and for all on Golgotha, is made real for us every time we celebrate the Eucharist. Here Christ makes himself present with his body and blood to become our food.

How significant it must be for you, men and women of the agricultural world, to contemplate on the altar this miracle which crowns and exalts the very wonders of nature. Is not a miracle worked each day when a seed becomes an ear of corn and so many grains from it ripen to be ground and made into bread? Is not the cluster of grapes that hangs on the branch of the vine one of nature's miracles? All this already mysteriously bears the mark of Christ, since "all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (*Jn 1: 3*). But greater still is the event of grace in which the Word and the Spirit of God make the bread and wine, "fruit of the earth and work of human hands", the Body and Blood of the Redeemer. The Jubilee grace that you have come to implore is none other than a superabundance of Eucharistic grace, the power that raises us and heals us from within by grafting us on to Christ.

6. The attitude that we should take towards this grace is suggested to us by the Gospel example of the poor widow who puts her small coins into the treasury but in fact gives more than everyone else, since she is not giving out of her abundance, but is putting in "her whole living" (*Mk 12: 44*).

Thus this unknown woman is following in the footsteps of the widow of Zarephath, who opened her home and her table to Elijah. Both are sustained by their faith in the Lord. Both draw from faith the strength for heroic charity.

They invite us to open our Jubilee celebration to the horizons of love and to see all the poor and

needy of this world. What we do for the least of them we will have done for Christ (cf. *Mt 25: 40*).

And how could we forget that the sphere of agricultural work involves human situations that deeply challenge us? Entire peoples, who depend primarily on farming in economically less developed regions, live in conditions of poverty. Vast regions have been devastated by frequent natural disasters. And sometimes these misfortunes are accompanied by the consequences of war, which not only claims victims, but sows destruction, depopulates fertile lands and even leaves them overrun with weapons and harmful substances.

7. The Jubilee began in Israel as a great time for reconciliation and the redistribution of goods. To accept this message today certainly cannot mean limiting oneself to a small donation. We must contribute to a culture of solidarity which, at the political and economic level, both national and international, encourages generous and effective initiatives for the benefit of less fortunate peoples.

Today we want to remember all these brothers and sisters in our prayer, with the intention of expressing our love for them in active solidarity, so that everyone without exception can enjoy the fruits of "mother earth" and live lives worthy of God's children.

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