



The Holy See

*MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II ON THE OCCASION OF THE VII WORLD FOOD DAY**

The theme chosen for the seventh World Food Day seems to me to be very opportune. Small farmers represent an important proportion of the active population particularly in the less industrialized countries. It is thus appropriate that the Organization of the United Nations for Food and Agriculture (F.A.O.) is drawing attention to their living and working conditions, through information, reflection and research conducted in a great number of countries of the world.

The Church has frequently expressed her solidarity with respect to small farmers, smallholders or their employees. By the present message, I would like to give them a new sign of interest, at a time when they are claiming the attention of all.

The Second Vatican Council itself underlined the difficulties they would have to face when it examined the guiding principles of economic and social life. Recalling the fact that many farmers are deprived of security and of the minimum of independence which would open to them possibilities of promotion, the Council added: "Reforms are called for in these different situations: incomes must be raised, working conditions improved, security in employment assured, and personal incentives to work encouraged; estates insufficiently cultivated must even be divided up and given to those who will be able to make them productive" (Gaudium et Spes, n. 71, par. 6).

Small farmers live in a situation that is often precarious: the fruit of their labour depends on natural conditions that are largely beyond human control. They do not have the reserves at their disposal to subsist in the case of a bad harvest: this leaves them financially even less capable of procuring the necessary expensive technical tools. Moreover, even the harvest is abundant, they encounter serious difficulties of transportation, marketing, and storage. One cannot forget that this economic vulnerability has very obvious repercussions on the personal and family lives of the small farmer; many of them devote to their task, and under difficult conditions, a number of hours which notably exceeds that of other workers. In many cases, the entire family becomes involved in this

agricultural exploitation, the women to the detriment of the care of their home, the children who see the normal progress of their scholastic development thwarted. As a rule, they are at a disadvantage in the areas of health needs, means of information and education, and even in the ability to express their opinion in the social and political spheres.

This World Day is making a very timely contribution in bringing these difficulties to the attention of the civil authorities of each country and to that of all the international organizations so that all who share civil responsibility in the countries and also those involved in international exchanges may realize the gravity of the human problems facing the most vulnerable of their partners in society.

In the course of my travels and again recently in Latin America, I have had numerous opportunities to hear the small farmers express their difficulties of survival. It is natural that I make reference here to the grave preoccupations which have been confided to me in the countries of the Third World.

It is true that the Church's mission is not to treat directly of such problems nor to intervene in their technical and social solution. Yet the human aspects cannot leave Christians indifferent. I can assure you that, through their various organizations, particularly under the form of cooperatives, they contribute actively to a necessary solidarity. This is true especially when the economic hardships place people at a disadvantage with respect to societies which have abundant economical means at their disposal.

We cannot forget that the earth and the fruits of the earth are gifts given by God to all. We sincerely hope that all may benefit from them through equitable sharing. We implore the blessing of God the Almighty Creator on the men and women who cultivate the earth, particularly on the most deprived among them, and on those who are engaged in defending their human dignity as our brothers and sisters, with respect and love.

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