



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
ON THE GOSPEL OF WORK
TO THE DIOCESE OF ROME**

Dear Brothers and Sisters who live and work in this beloved city of Rome!

1. We are now close to the year 2000, when Christians will celebrate the Great Jubilee of the most important event in history: the Incarnation of the Son of God and his full involvement in human events as Saviour and Lord.

The Jubilee concerns the whole Church but most especially the inhabitants of Rome, called to live intensely this season of grace and to welcome millions of pilgrims from every part of the world. Rome and its Christian community are invited joyfully to express their own identity and to fulfil with profound responsibility the mission, entrusted to them by Providence, of being the seat of the Successor of Peter, a living centre of the Church's catholicity and a reference point for the spiritual and civil development of all humanity.

To prepare Romans to renew their faith in preparation for the Holy Year, I proclaimed the City Mission, which is producing positive results. It is meant to bring the message of Jesus Christ to every home, to reach every inhabitant of Rome and to penetrate every place where people live and work.

2. Dear brothers and sisters who live and work in Rome, to each of you I renew the pressing appeal that has been echoing in the city's parishes, homes and streets since the Mission began: "Open the door to Christ your Saviour". In this last year of immediate preparation for the Jubilee, I invite you to open not only your heart, but also the places where you work, to let the Cross of Jesus Christ enter, the one source of salvation for every person and the sure foundation of a fully

human, united and fraternal society.

Thinking back to the years of my youth when I experienced what it means to be a worker and to later years when I was a university teacher, I gladly share your feelings, concerns and the demands of the world of work and culture.

3. In my Encyclicals and meetings with the groups concerned, I have frequently mentioned the "Gospel of work" in relation to the problems of the various professions. In this Letter I would like to reflect on several aspects concerning the goals of this final phase of the City Mission which wants to reach the different areas in order to reawaken every person's faith in Christ.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus asks the question: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (Lk 9:25). The words of the Gospel and the entire Christian message recall first of all that the most precious value to be defended and promoted in the workplace is the human person, with his inalienable right to have his profound dignity recognized. In fact, man and woman, created in the "image and likeness of God" (cf. Gn 1:27), are called in Christ to receive adoption as children and to contribute by their work to the betterment of creation itself.

This dignity is the foundation of every other duty and right of the working person: an occupation suited to his professional skills and family needs; the production of quality goods and services; retributive justice and solidarity.

Work is a way to self-fulfilment, through the growth and development of the potential and abilities which are acquired by training, experience and concrete activity.

This process is more evident in certain professions connected with the fields of culture, art, the cinema and the theatre, as well as with scientific research, but it also takes place in the exercise of more executive roles, since human work presupposes intelligence and aims at impressing an intelligent plan on the material and social reality in which the person works.

4. However, consideration of the gap between what is proposed and what people actually succeed in doing, that is, an awareness of the personal and sociocultural limitations which affect us, often adds painful elements to the concrete experience of work. This experience, moreover, is radically marked by sin, which takes the form of unbridled competitiveness, jealousy, arrogance, superficiality or indifference in mutual relations, injustice and abuse.

The pace of work, determined by the race for efficiency and profit, often leads to absolutizing the complex demands of economic activity, to the detriment of the humanization of the workplace and the fundamental rights of the person. Precisely for these reasons, work is sometimes experienced as toil unavoidably linked to survival, rather than a way to fulfil oneself and reach the goal desired

by God.

Frequently we are faced with choosing between fidelity to the values and principles professed, even going against the tide and paying the price, and accepting the prevailing mentality in many areas, perhaps even being reduced to compromising one's conscience.

How are we to deal with these difficult situations?

In the many problematic circumstances of life, the Christian knows he can count on the gift of wisdom, which is obtained by prayer and strengthened by listening to the Lord's word and obeying the Magisterium of the Church. It is this gift of the Spirit, received in Baptism and Confirmation, which helps us find the best way to bear witness to the truth and the moral good, if necessary to the point of conscientious objection.

However, the Christian also knows that work is part of the daily path of purification and salvation for those who accept it in a spirit of obedience to God's will and of humble and patient service to others. In the Cross of Christ he will find the strength to face situations of hardship or difficulty and to offer everyone an effective and consistent witness.

5. From the Christian vision of work springs the constant commitment to give priority in every circumstance to the good of the person and to his full spiritual, cultural and social development.

Thus, in hospitals it is the sick person who must be the centre of every medical, nursing or administrative service; in schools and universities, it is the student who should be helped, through teaching and formation, to be trained one day to fulfil his own task in society; in factories and in the offices of public and private firms, in commercial and business activities, it is the achievement of a better quality of life and not merely increased output and profits which are the absolute and indispensable law; in professional life, in administrative offices and in the service sector, it is honesty, competence and quality services which should be given priority in satisfying people's requests; in communications the primary value is service to the truth, which must be maintained with constant fidelity; in the administration of justice it is the right of every person and respect for lawfulness which must guide magistrates and lawyers; in sports, tourism and hospitality it is the growth of the human person that should be promoted in all his abilities and in his physical and spiritual needs.

6. The quality of the workplace depends primarily on individuals. It is their efforts that can make it a vital place for collaboration, communion and relationships marked by respect and mutual esteem, by cooperation and solidarity, and by a witness consistent with the moral values of their own profession. As Scripture recalls: "A brother helped by a brother is like a strong city" (Prv 18:19).

Therefore the Christian does not regard his colleagues as rivals but as coworkers, and treats those who benefit his own professional activity as brothers and sisters to be served for the love of Christ. This vision of work, leading to attitudes and conduct that are not formal or superficial but marked by constant dialogue, acceptance and understanding, makes the workplace an occasion for human growth and sanctification.

7. The right ordering of relations in the workplace requires the constant exercise of justice: this must be promoted by trade unions and various organizations, whose purpose is to ensure not only a just wage but also respect for rights and duties of individuals and the harmonious development of professional and working conditions.

A sense of justice also requires the improvement of professional skills, respect for the values of honesty and lawfulness, and attention to the needs of those involved in productive activities.

Lastly, the organization of work must bear in mind the expectations of the family and of women, with particular regard to maternity, Sunday rest and leisure time.

As I recalled in my recent Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*: "Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live. Even the beauties of nature - too often marred by the desire to exploit, which turns against man himself - can be rediscovered and enjoyed to the full.... If after six days of work - reduced in fact to five for many people - people look for time to relax and to pay more attention to other aspects of their lives, this corresponds to an authentic need which is in full harmony with the vision of the Gospel message" (n. 67).

8. Justice goes hand in hand with solidarity, which links men and women of the working world and leads to inescapable commitments which go beyond personal or group advantage. Justice and solidarity require us to address the serious problem of those seeking their first job or who are unemployed.

In the city of Rome as well, these situations represent the pressing anxiety of too many families and weigh heavily on the future of young people, shattering their expectations, hopes and plans.

The crisis of the labour market is accompanied by new forms of poverty which affect a growing number of families, the elderly, the disabled and immigrants, while important sectors of urban life such as health care, the school, the home and social services are going through a difficult period and not only for economic reasons.

The solution to these problems calls for the timely and responsible commitment of everyone: political institutions, industries, public and private business people, trade unions, professionals,

merchants and craftsmen, labourers, schools and universities, the media, families, young people and ecclesial groups must join forces so that the crisis of hope which seems to dampen the enthusiasm of many Romans does not become a permanent condition. I hope that with the cooperation of all and the advent of social, economic and political policies more open to initiative and change, a more creative and confident attitude will be fostered in this city.

In this regard, I invite the Christian community and individual believers to a constant commitment to reflection and planning, so that Rome, by relying on its spiritual and civil mission and making the most of its human, cultural and religious heritage, can further its civil and economic development to the benefit of the whole Italian nation and the world.

9. Dear workers, teachers, professionals, business people, craftsmen and merchants, the City Mission is a great opportunity to examine the many aspects of the service you provide in your work or profession. It is a summons to everyone, but particularly to believers in Christ, whose efforts in the workplace and in professional activity cannot be limited to economic, social and organizational problems and needs, but must take responsibility for witnessing to the Gospel at a personal and public level as the primary way to make work fully human and an occasion of salvation for the individual and for society.

The evangelization of the working world entails fidelity and honesty in carrying out one's professional service, moral consistency in lesser and greater decisions and fraternal solidarity towards those in need. It also requires the witness, wherever possible and appropriate, to one's Christian identity, so that the message of Jesus Christ, the one Saviour, may be offered in every workplace as a gift and grace of inner renewal and a force for social change. Indeed, the Son of God "worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Whoever believes in him and follows him finds the light and strength to be salt and leaven in every situation and circumstance.

The mission demands the courageous, respectful and careful proclamation of the Gospel, in the awareness that Christ is awaited by the heart of every person, and that in him alone lies the answer to the deepest questions of every man and woman.

10. Dear brothers and sisters of Rome, do not be afraid to offer Christ to your colleagues and to hang the Cross where you work and in your homes: it will remind everyone of the loving gift of God's Son, who redeemed the world and every state of life and work from sin.

The Church needs lay people who are authentic workers for the new evangelization in the secularized contexts of our time. "You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world", Jesus tells his disciples; "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:13-16). Always and everywhere fulfil the Lord's command, concretely and consistently.

11. May Mary, Mother of God's Son and our Mother, help and support you. She not only put her energies as a woman, wife and mother at the service of her Son's growth but dedicated herself with generous and unfailing love to her brothers and sisters, bringing them the joy of the Lord's presence. Mary, Christ's first disciple, made her life a generous gift, cherishing in her heart everything that happened to her and discovering in life's events the will of God, to which she adhered with total obedience and fidelity.

May the intercession of the Mother of God obtain for all believers in Christ total fidelity to the Gospel and the courage to proclaim it by their words and their life.

12. I trust that this Letter, together with the Crucifix, the sign of this Mission, will find its way to every area of the city and will be accepted as a message of hope and an invitation to walk together on the way of faith in Christ, of brotherhood and of true freedom.

May my Apostolic Blessing come upon all of you, your families, your work and your professional plans.

From the Vatican, 8 December 1998, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

© Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana