



The Holy See

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(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

HOLY MASS FOR FARMERS IN LEGAZPI CITY

HOMILY OF THE POPE JOHN PAUL II

Legazpi City (Philippines)

Saturday, 21 February 1981

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. The readings of today's liturgy, listened to against the background of your beautiful Mayon, acquire a special meaning and a living clarity. The almost perfect cone of Mayon accentuates the verdict of perfection pronounced by God regarding his creation.

But it is not only the beauty of creation that Mayon reminds us of. Its shape resembles hands in an attitude both of thanksgiving and acceptance : thanksgiving for the gift of the land for all people, and acceptance to put into it the human effort of work.

I have been eagerly waiting to meet you, in order to give you this twin message : *the land as God's gift for all men, and the beautiful mystery of work.*

2. Why to you, my dear farm-workers? Because you are important and have a special place in God's plan for the world : you provide food for your fellowman. It is a task that deserves the appreciation and grateful esteem of all; it is a task which deserves the recognition of the dignity of those engaged in it. You have every right therefore to expect from the Pope, who is your father and brother and servant in Christ, a word of encouragement and hope, of guidance and support.

But I wanted so very much to meet you not only for this reason, but also to proclaim the important values to which your lives bear witness. The rural world truly possesses enviable *human and religious riches*: a deep-rooted love of the family and of peace, a religious sense, an appreciation of friendship, trust and openness to God, and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, particularly in your case under the title of Our Lady of Peñafrancia.

Do you not extol these values when you sing :

Kung ang hanap mo ay ligaya sa buhay

(If your quest is happiness in life)

Sa libis ng nayon doon manirahan :

(In the farm you reside)

Taga-bukid man ay may gintong kalooban,

(Although farm people, they have a golden heart)

Kayamanan at dangal ng kabukiran.

(Which is the treasure and pride of the farm)?

It is a well-deserved tribute of recognition that the Pope wishes to express to you, for society is indeed indebted to you. Thank you, my dear farm-workers, for your precious contribution to the social well-being of mankind ; society owes you a great deal.

3. Your distinct contribution to society rests on your deep and living awareness that *the land is a gift of God*, a gift that he makes to all human beings, whom he wishes to see gathered in a single family and treating one another as brothers and sisters^[1]. Is not this gift emphasized in the first chapter of Genesis? "And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed ... and every tree with seed in its fruit : you shall have them for food'"^[2]. The land belongs to man because God entrusted it to man, and by his work man subdues it and makes it yield fruit^[3].

What follows from this? That it is not the will of God—it is not according to his plan—for this gift to be used in such a way that its benefits are to the advantage of only a few, while others, the vast majority, are excluded. And when this vast majority are in fact excluded from sharing the benefits of the land, and consequently condemned to a state of want, poverty and borderline existence, then it is a very serious matter.

For in this case, the land is not serving the dignity of human persons—human persons called to the fullness of life in Christ Jesus ! But this is what you are and must always remain, in your own eyes and in the eyes of others, in theory and in practice. Consequently, you must be able to realize your human potentialities—potentialities for "being more". You have the right to live and to be treated in accordance with your human dignity ; at the same time you have the corresponding duty to treat others in the same way. You should then be able to draw from your work on the farms the necessary and sufficient means to meet your family and social responsibilities in a worthy human and Christian way.

4. In the Book of Genesis we see that "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it"[4]. And in our reading today we heard God's command : Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over creation[5].

What do these texts tell us? The clear language of the Bible is telling us that it is our Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an *intelligent and noble master and guardian*, and not as a reckless exploiter. This is what is meant when we are told "to have dominion", "to till" the earth : the principle that dictates the obligatory line of action for all those who are responsible for, and interested in, the problem of the earth : persons invested with public authority, technicians, entrepreneurs, and workers.

Recalling here what I said on another occasion, but adapting it to you and your country, let me urge you to till the land of your beloved Philippines and to preserve it. Make the most of the goods of nature; ensure that they will yield more in favor of man, the man of today and of tomorrow. As regards the use of God's gift of the land, it is necessary to think a great deal of the future generations, to pay the price of austerity in order not to weaken or reduce—or worse still, to make unbearable—the living conditions of future generations. Justice and humanity require this too[6].

5. Our response to God's gift is made with human effort and work. These characterize man's struggle in time and space to subdue nature ; they are the subject of my special message to you, my dear workers, tricycle and jeepney drivers.

I feel deep joy when I meet workers like you, for you remind me of those years in my youth when I too experienced the grandeur and severity, the happy hours and the moments of anxiety, the achievements and the frustrations that a worker's condition entails. Thank you then most especially for giving me this opportunity to meet you.

Let us reflect together on the *dignity of work, the nobility of work*. Do I have to tell you about it? You know the dignity and the nobility of your work—you who work to live, to improve your life, to provide for your children's sustenance, education and well-being. Your work is noble because it is a service for your families and for the wider community, which is society. Work is a service in which man himself grows to the extent to which he gives himself for others.

6. For this reason, a fundamental concern of one and all—rulers, labor leaders and businessmen—must be this : *to give work to everyone*. But there is a deeper reason why every man has the right to work ; it is in order to be in a position to fulfill completely his human vocation, that is, to become in Christ a co-creator with God. Man becomes more fully man by means of work freely undertaken and performed. Work is not punishment, but an honor. It has become difficult and burden-some only because of sin : "With sweat on your brow shall you eat bread"[7], but it always retains its uplifting dignity.

Let us not deceive ourselves. Providing employment must not be taken lightly, or considered a secondary aspect of the economic order and of development. It should be a central element in the aims of economic theory and practice.

7. But it is not only employment that justice requires. Justice also requires that workers be paid a wage that is sufficient to maintain their families in a manner consonant with human dignity.

It requires, moreover, that *working conditions* should be as worthy as possible, and that social security should be perfected so as to enable everyone, on the basis of growing solidarity, to face up to risks, difficult situations and social burdens ; that wages should be regulated in their various and complementary forms ; that workers should have a real and just share in the wealth that they help to produce in enterprises, in professions and in the national economy.

You can be sure that your Pope is with you on this issue and on similar issues, because what is at stake is man and his dignity.

There are many more reflections that I would like to make with you, my dear brothers and sisters. But it is time to continue the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Before I do so, however, let me once more make this appeal : never forget the great dignity which, as human beings and as Christians, you should imprint on your work, even the most ordinary work, even the most insignificant tasks.

Never let yourselves be degraded by work, but rather try to live thoroughly your real dignity, according to the word of God and the teaching of the Church. Yes, from the viewpoint of faith, work corresponds to the will of God the Creator. It is part of God's plan for man and for the fulfillment of the human person ; by work man is indeed given a share in God's own work of creation. And from the viewpoint of faith, *work is immeasurably ennobled by Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man*. By his work as a carpenter in Nazareth and by his many other labors he sanctified all human work, thus conferring on workers a special solidarity with himself and giving them a share in his own redemptive work of uplifting humanity, transforming society, and leading the world to the praise of his Father in heaven. All of this shows too the need for work to be performed well, and the obligation on the part of workers to fulfill their duties conscientiously and in accordance with the requirements of justice and love.

8. Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ : the Pope invites you to pray with him and with the universal Church, so that all the farmers and workers of the world will live their dignity, fulfill their role worthily and make their great contribution to the building up of the Kingdom of Christ, for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity.

And may Our Lady of Peñafrancia continue to love you, console you, and protect you and your families and your country. Amen.

[1] Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

[2] *Gen* 1:29.

[3] Cf. *Gen* 1:28.

[4] *Gen* 2:15.

[5] Cf. *Gen* 1:28.

[6] Cf. Homily at Recife, No. 7, July 7, 1980.

[7] *Gen* 3:19.

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