



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF RURAL AUSTRALIA
AT THE «FESTIVAL CENTRE»**

Melbourne (Australia), 30 November 1986

*Dear Friends,*¹ It is a great joy for me to meet in prayer with representatives of rural Australia. The people involved in farming and grazing, fishing, forestry and all forms of cultivation constitute a vital part of Australian life. Indeed it is true to say that all your fellow citizens depend on you for food and for many other products of water, sun and soil. And in fact, many beyond this continent rely upon your generous efforts for the basic necessities of life. That is why my journey to your country would have been incomplete without this meeting with you, the men and women who, by daily toil, make this land fertile and productive. My cordial greetings go to you who are present and to all your friends and neighbours in rural Australia. It is fitting that we should gather in prayer. Rural life places you close to nature, which is the creation of God. In your daily labour, you touch the works of the Creator. You experience his providence. You admire his greatness. And, with the passing of the seasons and the years, you become increasingly aware that creation is a mystery far beyond human understanding. For you who live close to the land and sea, then, it seems so natural and right to pray to God, to seek his help in time of need, to offer him praise and thanksgiving. Your special calling helps you to accept with gratitude the word of God and his guiding providence. It is dear from the Gospel that Jesus also lived in close contact with nature. His teaching is filled with references to nature and human life. He spoke of the shepherd and his flock, the net cast into the sea, the mustard seed, the lilies of the field and so on. He even described his own mission in the world as that of "the Good Shepherd", and he compared his preaching to the work of a farmer going out to sow his seed. For many reasons, then, the Church holds rural life in high esteem. This is why I have looked forward to meeting you and praying with you. My pastoral concern includes all the people of Australia, and I have already visited some of your country's largest industrial and residential centres. And I am pleased that this morning I can be with you.² In recent decades, Australia has become a major trading nation. At the centre of this development stands your country's agriculture. What began nearly two hundred years ago as a humble enterprise for supplying food and clothing to convicts, soldiers, administrators and other has developed into a major industry. In the past two centuries, you have not only supplied your own basic necessities, but you have clothed and fed millions of people around the world. Your agricultural industry today is well diversified. Although you are best known for your production of grain, wool and meat, you can also rightly boast of forestry and fishing, and of horticultural and vegetable enterprises of major significance. However, I know that I am

meeting you at a time when there are serious difficulties on the horizon. In fact, they have already begun to have an impact on you and your families. Like a number of your overseas counterparts, many of you who are engaged in farming are facing serious financial and social stresses, some of which are completely beyond your control. There is the problem of inflation, and the even more complex problems arising from the policies of other nations, government tariffs, quotas on imports and subsidized agricultural production. Such problems, which are being felt worldwide, require a patient and persistent commitment to multilateral trade negotiations and international agreements. In all of these initiatives, I assure you of the Church's deep interest and concern.³ These problems and uncertainties in the world market-place are not the first that Australian farmers have had to face. A great part of your land is subject to a frequently harsh and unpredictable climate. From the beginning, you have had to adapt and to experiment; you have frequently known hardship and sacrifice; but through perseverance and prayer you have gone on. The obstacles and challenges have not broken your spirit. On the contrary, among other achievements, they have led to the development of new agricultural technology which is benefitting people in countries far beyond your shores. And you are now among the most efficient dry land farmers in the world. More importantly, you have learned the crucial value of stable family life and of solidarity between neighbours. Your literature and your poetry speak of the spirit of fraternal cooperation and creativity which you enjoy. Indeed it has been said that adversity, droughts and floods have never kept an "Aussie" down for long! In country towns and villages you experience community life in a way that people in the large metropolitan centres are hardly able to do. Your strong sense of common life makes you and your children aware of your unique value as persons, and at the same time it involves everyone in a shared goal and purpose. Your precious rural traditions deserve to be preserved and protected. They are also a cause for gratitude to God and for generous openness to others.⁴ In the Gospel we have listened to this morning, the Apostles suggest to Jesus that he should send the crowd away so that they can find food and lodging. But Jesus does not follow their advice. Instead he says: "Give them something to eat yourselves". This reply takes the Apostles by surprise, for they feel completely inadequate to the task of feeding so many. Yet they heed his words and immediately follow the instructions that he gives. In our modern world where hunger still remains a daily reality for millions of people, these words of our Lord retain their impact. For in faith we know that he is repeating today the charge he gave to the Apostles: "Give them something to eat yourselves". I am sure that, as people who have such a primary role in the production of food, you are moved by these words. At the same time, it is clear that the problem of feeding the world today, for the most part, does not rest in the hands of farmers. In fact, farmers are already producing enough food to supply the whole world's population. And it is well known that even more could be produced. Yet millions of our brothers and sisters in the world are still suffering from hunger. Why? This is the complex problem that must be solved. In the Gospel story, Jesus took the loaves and fish, blessed them and "handed them to his disciples to distribute among the crowd". The disciples' task was distribution. In our own day, farmers collaborating with their Creator can produce enough food for everyone on earth. The fact that the food already available is still not reaching the starving millions is one of the greatest scandals of our age. Such a grave imbalance calls for serious adjustments in the international economic order and greater worldwide cooperation in the production and distribution of food. As I said in my message for the Third World Food Day: "Obviously, the urgency of such international solidarity calls first upon all the countries that are most advanced in their development and their Governments... The Christian people, for its part, would be unfaithful to the example and teaching of its Founder were it not to fulfil its duties of solidarity with those who suffer from undernourishment".⁵ The problems associated with hunger in the modern world are ones which we must all face together. At the same time, they reaffirm the vital role of agriculture today. As I stated in my Encyclical on Human Work: "The world of agriculture, which provides society with the goods it needs for its daily sustenance, is of fundamental importance". This is why I want you to know that the Pope is close to you in your work and in all your anxieties and

hopes. I assure you of my esteem for rural life and for the values that you hold dear. Indeed the entire Church turns to the agricultural world with pastoral concern and prayerful encouragement, and she especially desires to help you maintain the sound family traditions which have always been the great blessing of rural life. Dear brothers and sisters: the Church gives thanks to God for you, for what you offer to the rest of society, for the priority you give to family and community life, for the witness you bear to the sacredness of life, for the trust you manifest in the loving providence of God, our Creator and our Father. Rural Australia! You must always stand firm in these fundamental values. And if you do so, your very lives will echo the message of this morning's hymn: "Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness;

O praise him, alleluia!" © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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