



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MALTA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE WORKERS OF MALTA

*Saint Margherita Square, Cottonera
Saturday, 26 May 1990*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. I thank God for this opportunity to be with you. This meeting which the *workers of Malta* is one of the high points of my Pastoral Visit, and I have been looking forward to it as a moment of friendly dialogue with you, the men and women whose daily toil is the very life-blood of Maltese society. My wish would be to greet each of you individually. I ask you to take the Pope's words of affection and encouragement to your loved ones, especially your children, and to your fellow-workers who could not be present. I greet you all: those who work in agriculture, in industry including the many who work in the nearby shipyards in offices and in the tourist industry. I greet the representatives of the various trade unions and workers' organizations, as well as the public officials and the members of the business community. To all of you I repeat *the Church's great esteem for the world of work*. Work is a fundamental part of our life here on earth. It often involves heavy fatigue and even suffering, but it can also be the forge of strong character and vigorous personality, the means by which we build up the world according to the values in which we believe. For the Christian, work is *our way of taking an active and responsible part in the marvellous work of the Creator* which surrounds us everywhere and completely fills our being.2. But why should the Pope talk about work? Perhaps some people may think that he has no right to do so; they think that work has little or nothing to do with religion. I might answer by saying that my own personal experience of work was one of the most interesting and formative periods of my life. I have expressed the richness of that experience in some of my writings. Today I have come to you, the workers of Malta, as a friend who shares the concerns and hopes of the men and women who in the words of the book of Genesis earn their bread by the sweat of their brow (Cfr. *Gen.* 3, 19). I have also come as the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, and therefore as a *messenger of One who was known as a carpenter and the son of a carpenter* (Cfr. *Matth.* 13, 55;

Marc. 6, 3). Yes, *the world of work is not alien to the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. The Lord understood perfectly the reality of human labour. His words were filled with references to workers and their various occupations: the farmer who plants the seed and the labourer who harvests the crop, the vinedresser and the shepherd, the one who mends the nets beside the sea, the builder and the domestic servant, the merchant and the housewife, the soldier and the State official. They all had a place in Jesus' interest and teaching. And the Apostles he chose to carry on his redemptive mission were workers and fishermen.³ In every age the Church continues to present Jesus' teaching about work, and especially today when economic relations and production processes are complex and increasingly impersonal, and threaten to turn against man himself. The Church preaches a Social Doctrine because the great questions affecting society, not least the question of labour, *have a powerful impact on people's lives and cannot be separated from the moral and ethical responsibilities of everyone involved*. Unfortunately, it is the experience worldwide that the *history of labour relations*, especially during the last two centuries, has often developed as a *social struggle* between workers and employers. Only with great difficulty has the ideal of social justice made headway. Today, with the opening of so many previously closed frontiers and the determination of peoples to live in freedom from ideological oppression, it is becoming clearer that although the quest for justice can be opposed and delayed, it cannot be suppressed. It is a fundamental aspiration of the human spirit. Systems built on untruths about the spiritual nature of man and of human relations cannot last. The dignity of the human person is the only solid basis of a social system capable of giving the right direction to human relations, and of fostering mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation. In an increasingly interdependent world, there can be no other way forward. In Malta, too, this is imperative.⁴ Even though there are many kinds of work, in a sense all work shares the same nature. Its purpose is to transform and organize reality in a way that is useful and productive. *Work is the implementation of God's original command*, recorded in the first pages of the Bible: "Fill the earth and subdue it" (*Gen. 1, 28*). Whether through physical, intellectual or spiritual effort, "each and every individual takes part in the giant process whereby man 'subdues the earth' through his work" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Laborem Exercens*, 4). This is the beginning of what I call *the "Gospel of work" which the Church wishes to transmit to the modern world*. Whoever hears this "Gospel" and lives by it can no longer look upon labour as a mere commodity to be bartered in exchange for pay. In a wider and more noble view, work must also be seen as the path to self-development and as the normal means for people to create the conditions that permit a healthy cultural, social and religious life (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 67). Because the nature and organization of labour affects people so totally, Catholic Social Doctrine insists that *the human person is the centre and norm of all economic processes*. That is why the Second Vatican Council made this earnest appeal: "The entire process of productive work must be adapted to the needs of the person and to the requirements of his life, above all of his family life" (*Ibid*). A change of priorities is needed in the world economic order if the reality of work is truly to serve people and not oppress them in new forms of slavery. This is especially evident in the condition of workers in the developing countries of the South, but also in the industrialized countries of the North. Maltese society too is called to strive for those changes which are necessary for promoting a development which embraces all sectors (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 21).⁵ The "Gospel of

work" holds that all honest labour, competently carried out, has an innate dignity and *confers dignity on those engaged in it*. That is why unemployment is such a deadly thing. It leaves its victims without adequate economic support, but more than that, it deprives them psychologically and socially. For that reason, I urge you: do not abandon the unemployed, especially young people seeking a livelihood. The unemployed and their families have a right to the effective solidarity of the State, of business interests and of workers' organizations themselves. Workers are the subjects of rights and duties. People who work, especially dependent workers, have a *right* to be treated for what they are: free and responsible men and women, called to have *a share in the decisions that concern their lives*. A society that seeks the true well-being of its members will make appropriate provision for family support. It will make it possible for mothers to give their primary attention to their children and homes, and, where necessary, it will provide for the special needs of working mothers. And particular classes of workers need the special attention and protection of society. Agricultural workers, for example, often feel that their contribution to society is not fully appreciated. The "Gospel of work", then, preaches that *economic, social and political systems must be sensitive to the complete well-being of individuals and to the needs of their families*. But workers and their organizations also have solemn *duties towards the common good*. The first of these duties is to work well, *to contribute effectively to building a better society*. This too is part of the "Gospel of work", proclaimed two thousand years ago in the life and activity of Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate Son of God. The value which Jesus placed on work during the long years of his hidden life was not lost on the early Christians. Saint Paul boasted of the fact that he worked day and night in order not to be a burden to others (Cfr. *2 Thess. 3, 8*), and he summed up the spirituality of work in these words: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward" (*Col. 3, 23-24*). These words are an invitation to integrity and competence on the part of everyone, workers and employers, people engaged at every level of economic and productive activity. At the same time, the Apostle is calling us *to widen the horizon of human activity to include God's plan for the world and for our eternal salvation*. The world of work must not be seen as a part of reality somehow opposed to faith and religion, as if in conflict with God and his Church. Work can be a source of satisfaction and development, as well as of cultural and spiritual growth, only if society sees it as cooperation in the creative intention of God and respects each person's unique dignity and higher aspirations, including the rights of conscience, as inalienable gifts of the Creator (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 35).⁶ *The outstanding virtue of the working men and women of Malta should be solidarity: a commitment to the common good; a rejection of selfishness and irresponsibility. We must become responsible for one another. What are needed are concrete acts of solidarity: between employers and employees, between working men and women themselves, with special sensitivity for the poor and the defenceless. In all of this, workers' unions have a specific part to play. It is their task to defend the rights of their members through the legitimate means at their disposal, keeping also in mind the rights of other categories of workers, the general economic situation of the country and, in short, the common good. In the present state of technological progress and social development they are being challenged to adopt a broader view of their social function and responsibilities. Their great task is to harmonize the quest for material progress with*

the cultural and spiritual advancement of society. In other words, *a great wave of social solidarity*, not conflict, *is the proper response to the increasingly interrelated and interdependent nature of today's problems*. But solidarity, dialogue and cooperation must be built on a firm foundation. These values demand a "readiness, in the Gospel sense, to 'lose oneself' for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to 'serve him' instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). Thus the *essence of the "Gospel of work" is also the heart of the Christian message itself*. Jesus Christ sums up his teaching in these familiar words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (*Matth. 22, 27*). The *first direction of work*, then, *is vertical* towards God: your work itself is an unfolding of the Creator's intention and a contribution to the realization in history of the divine plan (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 34). *The second direction of work is horizontal*: it is an effective way of putting into practice love of neighbour. Your work, insofar as it brings benefits of all kinds to society, is a magnificent form of service to others. The task then which the Pope leaves to the workers of Malta is *to integrate the world of work into the world of faith*. There can be no separation between the traditions of Catholic faith, manifested at Sunday Mass, and the sense of commitment, honesty, justice and brotherhood shown in the workplace during the week.⁷ Dear friends, it is in this spirit of the "Gospel of work", which was proclaimed by Jesus Christ two thousand years ago and continues to be proclaimed by the Church in our day, that I invite you to: Say No *to injustice* at every level of society!
 Say No *to the individual and class selfishness* that seeks its own interests without concern for the common good of the whole of society!
 Say No *to the materialism* that deadens conscience and the spiritual dimension of life!
 Say Yes *to a new solidarity* between all the members of the work force, and between workers and employers, between the world of work and the whole of Malta's people!
 Say Yes *to the full material and spiritual development of every inhabitant of these islands*, with special provision for the poorest and neediest!
 Say Yes *to God's plan for creation* and to his Truth written in nature of all things and in the depths of the human heart! The carpenter of Nazareth and the workers of Malta ought to be of one mind and one heart. Remember the words of the Scripture Reading we heard at the beginning of our meeting: "Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus" (*Col. 3, 17*). In union with Jesus Christ, your work and your efforts to transform the world take on the quality of *a sacrifice pleasing to God*. By offering "what earth has given and human hands have made" you prepare the way for God's kingdom. That is the deepest meaning of your labour. Dear brothers and sisters, may Christ's kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace, take possession of your hearts, for the true progress and prosperity of Malta. God bless you all.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana