



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION FOR ALL WORKERS ON THE FEAST OF SAINT JOSEPH

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Third Sunday of Lent, 19 March 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have listened together to a famous and beautiful passage from the Book of Exodus, in which the sacred author tells of God's presentation of the Decalogue to Israel. One detail makes an immediate impression: the announcement of the Ten Commandments is introduced by a significant reference to the liberation of the People of Israel. The text says: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex 20: 2).

Thus, the Decalogue is intended as a confirmation of the freedom gained. Indeed, at a closer look, the Commandments are the means that the Lord gives us to protect our freedom, both from the internal conditioning of passions and from the external abuse of those with evil intentions. The "nos" of the Commandments are as many "yeses" to the growth of true freedom.

There is a second dimension of the Decalogue that should also be emphasized: by the Law which he gave through Moses, the Lord revealed that he wanted to make a covenant with Israel. The Law, therefore, is a gift more than an imposition. Rather than commanding what the human being ought to do, its intention is to reveal to all the choice of God: He takes the side of the Chosen People; he set them free from slavery and surrounds them with his merciful goodness. The Decalogue is a proof of his special love.

Today's liturgy offers us a second message: The Mosaic Law was totally fulfilled in Jesus, who revealed God's wisdom and love through the mystery of the Cross, "a stumbling block to Jews and an absurdity to Gentiles; but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ is the power of

God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor 1: 23-24).

The Gospel just proclaimed refers precisely to this: Jesus drove the merchants and money-changers out of the temple. Through the verse of a Psalm: "Zeal for your house has consumed me" (cf. Ps 69[68]: 10), the Evangelist provides a key for the interpretation of this significant episode. And Jesus was "consumed" by this "zeal" for the "house of God", which was being used for purposes other than those for which it was intended.

To the amazement of everyone present, he responded to the request of the religious leaders who demand evidence of his authority by saying: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2: 19). These are mysterious words that were incomprehensible at the time; John, however, paraphrased them for his Christian readers, saying: "*Actually, he was talking about the temple of his body*" (Jn 2: 21).

His enemies were to destroy that "temple", but after three days he would rebuild it through the Resurrection. The distressful "stumbling block" of Christ's death was to be crowned by the triumph of his glorious Resurrection.

In this Lenten season, while we are preparing to relive this central event of our salvation in the Easter *triduum*, we are already looking at the Crucified One, seeing in him the brightness of the Risen One.

Dear brothers and sisters, today's Eucharistic Celebration, which combines the commemoration of St Joseph with meditation on the liturgical texts of the Third Sunday of Lent, gives us the opportunity to consider in the light of the Paschal Mystery another important aspect of human life. I am referring to the reality of work, which exists today in the midst of rapid and complex changes.

In many passages, the Bible shows that work is one of the original conditions of the human being. When the Creator shaped man in his image and likeness, he asked him to till the land (cf. Gn 2: 5-6). It was because of the sin of our first parents that work became a burden and an affliction (cf. Gn 3: 6-8), but in the divine plan it retains its value, unaltered.

The Son of God, by making himself like us in all things, dedicated himself for many years to manual activities, so that he was known as "the carpenter's son" (cf. Mt 13: 55). The Church has always, but especially in the last century, shown attention and concern for this social context, as the many social interventions of the Magisterium testify and the action of many associations of Christian inspiration show; some of them are gathered here today and represent the whole world of workers.

I am pleased to welcome you, dear friends, and I address my cordial greeting to each one of you.

A special thought goes to Bishop Arrigo Miglio of Ivrea and President of the Italian Episcopal Commission for Social Problems and Work, Justice and Peace, who has interpreted your common sentiments and addressed courteous good wishes to me for my name day. I am deeply grateful to him.

Work is of fundamental importance to the fulfilment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good.

At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life.

The invitation contained in the First Reading is appropriate in this regard: "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days you may labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, your God" (Ex 20: 8-9). The Sabbath is a holy day, that is, a day consecrated to God on which man understands better the meaning of his life and his work. It can therefore be said that the biblical teaching on work is crowned by the commandment of rest.

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* speaks opportunely of this: "For man, bound as he is to the necessity of work, this rest opens to the prospect of a fuller freedom, that of the eternal Sabbath (cf. Heb 4: 9-10). Rest gives men and women the possibility to remember and experience anew God's work from Creation to Redemption, in order to recognize themselves as his work (cf. Eph 2: 10), and to give thanks for their lives and for their subsistence to him who is their author" (n. 258).

Work must serve the true good of humanity, permitting "men as individuals and as members of society to pursue and fulfil their total vocation" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 35). For this to happen, technical and professional qualifications, although necessary, do not suffice; nor does the creation of a just social order, attentive to the common good.

It is necessary to live a spirituality that helps believers to sanctify themselves through their work, imitating St Joseph, who had to provide with his own hands for the daily needs of the Holy Family and whom, consequently, the Church holds up as Patron of workers. His witness shows that man is the subject and protagonist of work.

I would like to entrust to St Joseph those young people who are finding integration into the working world difficult, the unemployed and everyone who is suffering hardship due to the widespread employment crisis.

Together with Mary, his Spouse, may St Joseph watch over all workers and obtain serenity and peace for families and for the whole of humanity.

May Christians, looking at this great Saint, learn to witness in every working environment to the love of Christ, the source of true solidarity and lasting peace. Amen!

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