



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Feast of St Joseph

Wednesday, 19 March 1997

Work is for man, not man for work

1. Today's solemnity invites us to contemplate St Joseph's particular experience of faith beside Mary and Jesus.

The Church holds Joseph up for the veneration of the faithful as *the believer who was completely docile to the divine will, the man capable of a chaste and sublime love for his wife, Mary, and the teacher ready to serve God's mysterious plan in the Child Jesus.*

Tradition, in particular, has seen him as *the worker*. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Mt 13:55), the inhabitants of Nazareth exclaim when they see the miracles worked by Jesus. For them he is first and foremost the village carpenter, who expresses himself in work, fulfilling himself in God's sight by serving his brothers and sisters. The Christian community has also considered the life of St Joseph as exemplary for all who are involved in the vast and complex world of work. Precisely for this reason the Church wishes to entrust workers to his heavenly protection and has proclaimed him their patron.

2. The Church turns to the world of work, contemplating the carpenter's shop in Nazareth sanctified by the presence of Jesus and Joseph. She wishes *to promote man's dignity* in view of the questions and problems, the fears and hopes connected with work, a fundamental dimension of human life. She considers it her task "always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society" (*Laborem exercens*, n. 1).

With regard to the dangers present in certain expressions of our contemporary culture and economy, the Church does not cease to proclaim *the greatness of man*, the image of God, and *his primacy in creation*. She carries out this mission principally through her social teaching, which “is itself a valid *instrument of evangelization*”; indeed this teaching “proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself. In this light, and only in this light, does it concern itself with everything else: the human rights of the individual” (*Centesimus annus*, n. 54).

The Church reminds all who attempt to assert the predominance of technology, thereby reducing man to a “product” or a means of production, that “man is the subject of work”, since in the divine plan “work is ‘for man’ and not man ‘for work’” (*Laborem exercens*, nn. 5-6).

For the same reason, she also opposes the claims of capitalism, proclaiming “the principle of the priority of labour over capital”, since human labour “is always a primary efficient cause, while capital, the whole collection of means of production, remains a mere instrument or instrumental cause” (*ibid.*, n. 12) of the process of production.

3. While these principles emphasize the condemnation of any form of alienation in human activity, they are particularly timely with regard to the *serious problem of unemployment*, which today affects millions of people. They reveal in the right to work the modern guarantee of man's dignity; without suitable work he is deprived of the sufficient conditions for the adequate development of his personal and social dimension. In fact, unemployment creates in its victims a grave situation of marginalization and a painful state of humiliation.

The right to work must therefore be combined with that of *the freedom to choose one's own activity*. These prerogatives however must not be understood in an individualistic sense, but in relation to the vocation to service and co-operation with others. Freedom is not exercised morally without considering its relationship and reciprocity with other freedoms. These should be understood not so much as restrictions, but as conditions for the development of individual freedom, and as an exercise of the duty to contribute to the growth of society as a whole.

Thus work is primarily a right because it is a duty arising from man's social relations. It expresses man's vocation to service and solidarity.

4. The figure of St Joseph recalls the urgent need to give a soul to the world of work. His life, marked by listening to God and by familiarity with Christ, appears as *a harmonious synthesis of faith and life*, of personal fulfilment and love for one's brothers and sisters, of daily commitment and of trust in the future.

May his witness remind those who work that, only by accepting the primacy of God and the light that comes from Christ's Cross and Resurrection, can they fulfil the conditions of a labour worthy

of man and find in daily toil “a glimmer of new life, of the new good, as if it were an announcement of ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work” (*Laborem exercens*, n. 27).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I wish to greet the English-speaking visitors, especially the pilgrim groups from Korea, the Philippines, Canada and the United States. I thank the Catholic Central Concert Choir from Canada for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you I cordially invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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