



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO A GROUP OF HARBOUR WORKERS  
FROM UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*Saturday, 16 October 1982*

*Dear Friends,*

1. I am pleased to have this occasion to welcome you as members of the New York Shipping Association and the International Longshoremen's Association. In you I greet also all your fellow workers of the AFL-CIO and the International Transportation Workers. And may I add that my thoughts at this time go to all the workers of America.

2. Your visit to the Pope this morning is an opportunity for us to reflect together, howsoever briefly, on an important issue that touches your lives and the lives of millions of men and women everywhere, and it is this: *the value of work and the dignity of the workers*.

The Apostolic See and the whole Catholic Church throughout the world experience the need to reiterate this message in order to be faithful to Jesus Christ and to humanity. Work is a human participation in the creativity of God the Creator; in one form or another it is the task of all men and women. All people are called to understand the meaning of work in their lives and to see how it is related to the common good of society. In proclaiming the meaning of work and its value, the Church must necessarily insist on *the rights of workers*: rights which are given them by God and pertain to the nature of man, and which society is called upon to protect and foster – never to violate, or much less, to attempt to deny.

The rights of workers are the rights of the human person, which no human power can transgress with impunity. It is a question of inalienable rights and legitimate freedoms. Nine years ago my predecessor Paul VI put it this way: "For as long as, within the individual national communities, those in power do not nobly respect the rights and legitimate freedoms of the citizens, tranquillity

and order (even though they can be maintained by force) remain nothing but a deceptive and insecure sham, no longer worthy of a society of civilized beings” (PAULI VI *Allocutio ad Sacrii Collegii Cardinales*, die 21 dec. 1973: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XI (1973) 1227).

3. With her proclamation of the rights of the workers, the Church likewise proclaims their *duties*: by honest work, workers are called to contribute to the well-being of society and to that of all mankind. Both the rights and duties of workers emphasize their *opportunity for service* to the world. It is through work that man’s humanity is actualized; it is through the proper conditions of work that life becomes more human for individuals and for society. For this reason, I pointed out in my Encyclical on this subject that human work is a key to the whole social question – “probably *the essential key*” (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Laborem Exercens*, 3).

4. At this important moment in the history of the workers of the world, it is necessary to underline the “need for ever new *movements of solidarity* of the workers and with the workers” (*Ibid.* 8). You yourselves feel this solidarity with the workers of my native Poland, and I am grateful you. The power of your solidarity in a cause that is right is an immense contribution to the human dignity of workers everywhere. It is a matter of obtaining basic freedoms, which can only flourish, as you say in America, “with liberty and justice for all”.

On her part, the Catholic Church will continue to proclaim the value of work; she will labor and toil for this cause. But, above all, she will proclaim the dignity of the workers. And the Church will continue *to pray*, because this is her most effective contribution – the most effective contribution of us all.

And amidst your many activities, may you too lift up your hearts to God, the Creator of man, and continue to ask for liberty and justice for all.

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