

# Pontiff Stresses Full Employment

Vatican City (RNS) — In an audience for more than 2,000 industrial workers, Pope John Paul II recalled that he too once worked in a factory and therefore understands the problems and desires of workers, and sees the need for full employment.

The pope addressed the workers who belong to a Christian labor group and are employed in large industries throughout Italy.

"As you know," the pontiff said, "I too was a worker for a brief period in my life during the last World War. I also had the experience of working directly in the factory."

During the war, the Polish-born pope worked for Solvay, a Polish chemical manufacturer.

"Therefore," he said, "I know what daily labor as an employee means. I know the (hard work) and the

monotony. I know the needs of the workers, their just necessities and their legitimate aspirations. And I know how necessary it is that work never be alienating and frustrating, but always correspond to the superior spiritual dignity of man."

The pope emphasized that all people have the right to employment.

"I wish fervently that work be a real right for every

human being," he said. "The national and international situation today is so difficult and complicated that one cannot be simplistic. But, because we know that work is life, serenity, duty, interest, and meaning, we must wish it for all."

"He who works feels useful, valid, engaged in something which gives value to his life. Not to work is psychologically negative and dangerous."

## Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

### Christmas -- Whenever, Wherever . . .

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 1:26-38. (R1) 2 Sm. 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16. (R2) Rom. 16:25-27.

To prepare students for Christmas, I've been showing a filmstrip, "The Mouse in the Manger."



Fr. Shamon sheep, Sidney the donkey . . . and Mother Mary!

Oscar the mouse is the hero. He symbolizes the selfishness of children — a selfishness that continues in adults, but in more sophisticated forms. Oscar wants what he wants when he wants it! He can brook no delay in gratifying his desires, which he perceives as needs.

What Oscar loved most in this world was his straw

bed. He loved to play in the straw, crawl into it, curl up in it and fall asleep. One winter day Oscar said to his father that he was getting bigger and needed more straw for a larger bed. His father told him he would have to wait until spring. But not Oscar! He squealed and screamed — he wanted his straw now. So that night he ran away from home in search for more straw.

In his adventure, he came to a distant stable. Crawling through the gate, he began to gather straw, when Martha the cow bellowed, "What's a mouse doing in this stable?" Oscar timidly explained he wanted just a little straw, and to be friends. Martha, who personifies the snob that looks down on those lower than herself, said he could have some straw, but to be friends . . . "A cow of my importance cannot be friends with a mouse."

Hank the sheep overheard and bleated, "Does anyone need a friend?" Quickly, Oscar said he wanted just a little straw, and to be friends. "Take some straw," said

Hank. "But as for being friends, I'm so busy being friends that I can't be your friend except for a few hours Tuesday afternoon."

Hank the sheep is the shallow person. He's the part-time "friend" — the typical fair-weather friend. Everybody's friend, but friend to no one!

Sadly, Oscar went to the next stall to meet Sidney the donkey. Politely, he asked for some straw, and to be friends. But Sidney had a different idea about friendship. "Help yourself to the straw," he said, "but don't expect me to be your friend. That's dangerous business: I or you might get hurt if we become friends."

Sidney the donkey is the person who has tried to reach out, but has gotten hurt. So he retreats within himself. He no longer gets involved. He touches no one, and no one touches him.

Oscar gathered his straw and made himself a bed in the stable. It was perfect — just large enough, with plenty of straw. He fell sound asleep. In the middle of the night, a blue-white light awakened him. He blinked and saw a man and

a woman enter the stable. The woman sat down on a stone. Oscar crept close to see her. The woman squealed. "Don't be frightened," said the mouse. "I am Oscar and I am looking for a friend." As Oscar told of Martha, Hank and Sidney, Mary explained to him what a real friend is!

Oscar learns the lesson well, for when the lady asks Oscar to get some straw for her baby boy, Oscar fills the manger with the straw from his own bed. His straw! The one thing he wanted most in the world, he gave away! And he felt good!

The greatest challenge in life is to become the disciple of Jesus. That means being ready to give up what may seem most valuable to us. To put oneself last and another first.

Christmas did not occur only on a cold night in Bethlehem; Christmas happens everytime and everywhere we make a choice between selfishness and selflessness, everytime the Word is made flesh in our flesh.

God bless you all and a merry, merry Christmas!

## Insights in Liturgy

By FATHER ROBERT J. KENNEDY

### Keeping Christ In Christmas

When the Liturgical Year and Calendar were simplified and revised, it was with a clear-cut pastoral principle in mind: namely, "to allow the faithful, through their faith, hope and love, to share more deeply in the whole mystery of Christ as it unfolds throughout the year." This pastoral concern for nourishing the community's faith, combined with the adaptability of the liturgy, has enabled congregations to participate in the worship of God and to find meaning for their own faith.

However, there are problems. For some planning efforts have taken the principle of adaptability so far that the pastoral principle of the liturgical year is practically lost. The meanings of the feasts and seasons are in danger of being obscured unless we take the sharing "more deeply in the whole mystery of Christ" most seriously.

Even the major feasts are not exempted. There are tendencies in at least

three areas that, carried to their logical conclusion, will rob even the Christmas liturgies of their true meaning, leaving in their place a nice-looking but empty fraud.

First, there is a continuous surrender of the liturgy over to the present culture.

Example 1: Santa Claus is employed to read the scriptures, assist with the homily or give lollipops to the youngest children. Do we really want the fantasy figure, this symbol of materialism and consumerism, this tempter from generosity to selfish possessiveness at the celebration of one of the key mysteries of faith?

Example 2: Falling victim to Christmas advertising gimmicks and come-ons, we plan birthday parties for Jesus, complete with cake (which we don't eat because of the Communion fast!) and sing "Happy Birthday Dear Jesus," we decorate Christmas trees, and we plan other aberrations of questionable relationship to the feast.

Example 3: Secular culture has Christmas over and done with and all packed away on the last shopping day before. The Church is quickly catching up with this dubious example by scheduling as many as three "anticipated" Masses on Christmas Vigil and removing Masses from the schedule on Christmas morning! For 17 centuries, Dec. 25 has been the holy day, not Dec. 24!

Second, there is a tendency to "family" everything about Christmas. Now the concept of a Christmas Family Mass is a very good one, if it is meant to encourage families to worship together on Christmas. In this sense, however, every Christmas Mass should be a family Mass. But the pitch toward families can be very alienating of those who have no families, who have broken families or who are just not a "family" family. And in a season when loneliness, brokenness and isolation are felt all the more sharply, the Church community has a wider responsibility to welcome, not exclude, all people, with or without a family.

Third, there is the "Hallmark Card Syndrome." This is the tendency of Christmas liturgical celebrations, and

homilies in particular, to over-elaborate the crib — the baby surrounded by lambs, the angelic announcement, the shepherds and the Magi (or kings or astrologers). This reduces the force of this feast to a sentimental recollection of the past, from which everyone leaves feeling warm, but not for very long.

At the very least, the presence of so many unchurched Catholics at the Christmas Masses should challenge us to unleash the full power and revelation of this feast day so as to touch the hearts of all who attend, to nourish and strengthen their faith, to "speak tenderly" to them of their troubles, and to call them to new and more abundant life. For this feast of the union of humanity and divinity proclaims our salvation in Christ Jesus: the vulnerability and total dependence of the little babe in Bethlehem reveals the depth of God's love that joins our lives with his, that brings us from darkness into light, that forms us into a holy people. Christmas is the beginning of our redemption and we press on to that full manifestation of his glory that will surely come. God has shared our humanity so that we can share his glory.

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