

# 'To Be the Conscience of Consciences'

Following is the address given by Pope John Paul II to thousands of Indian peasant farmers in Cuilapan, Mexico, Jan. 29.

Dear beloved brothers,

I greet you with joy and I am grateful for your enthusiastic presence and the words of welcome that you have directed to me. I do not find a better way of expressing the feelings that fill my heart than the words of St. Peter, the first pope of the Church: "Peace to you who are in Christ." Peace to you who form such a numerous group.



Also you, residents of Oaxaca, of Chiapas, of Cuilapan and all those who come from so many other parts, heirs of the blood and the culture of your noble ancestors — in particular the Mixtecs and the Zapotecs — you were called to be saints, with all those who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Son of God "has come among us to make sons of God those who believe in his name." And he entrusted to the Church the continuation of his mission of salvation wherever there are men. It should not seem strange, then, that one day in the distant 16th century, there arrived here, because of their fidelity to the Church, courageous missionaries, eager to assimilate your customs and way of life to better reveal and give living expression of the image of Christ. Our grateful memory goes to the first bishop of Oaxaca, Juan Jose Lopez de Aarate, and so many other missionaries, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Jesuits, admirable men for their faith and their human generosity.

They knew very well the importance of culture as a vehicle to transmit the faith, so that men may progress in their knowledge of God. In this there can be no distinctions of races nor of cultures. "There is no Greek nor Jew, nor slave nor free man, there is only Christ in all."

This constitutes a challenge and a stimulus for the Church, because, being faithful to the genuine and total message of the Lord, it is necessary for the Church to open and to interpret all human reality in order to impregnate it with the strength of the Gospel.

Dearly beloved brothers: My presence among you is intended to be a living and authentic sign of this universal concern of the Church. The pope and the Church are with you and love you; love you yourselves, your culture, your traditions; admire your marvelous past, encourage you in the present and expect much of you in the future.

But not only of this do I wish to speak to you.

Through you, farmers and Indians, there appears before my eyes this immense crowd of the world of agriculture, still the prevalent part of the Latin American continent and a very large part, still, of our planet.

Before this impressive spectacle that is reflected in



While a little boy watches, Pope John Paul II gets a goodbye kiss from an admirer as he prepares to leave Mexico City on Jan. 31.

my eyes, I cannot help but think of the same picture which 10 years ago my predecessor, Paul VI, contemplated in his memorable visit to Colombia and most particularly in his meeting with rural workers.

With him, I want to repeat — and if it is possible, in an even stronger voice — that the current pope wants to be "linked to your cause, the cause of the poor countries, of the poor people;" that the pope is with this mass of the population, "almost always abandoned in an ignoble level of life and at times treated and exploited harshly."

Taking the line of my predecessors, John XXIII and Paul VI, as well as the council, and in view of a situation which continues to be alarming, not often better and sometimes worse, the pope wants to be your voice, the voice of those who cannot speak or who are silenced, to be the conscience of the consciences, the invitation to action, in order to make up for lost time, a time that is frequently one of prolonged suffering and of unfulfilled hopes.

In the deprived world of the rural areas, the worker, who by the sweat of his brow waters his affliction, cannot hope for more than that his dignity, which is not inferior to any other social class, is recognized fully and effectively.

He has the right to be respected, not to be deprived — through manipulations that at times amount to real thefts — of the little that he has; the right for his aspirations to play a part in his own promotion and not be blocked.

He has the right for the barriers of exploitation to be destroyed, barriers which frequently are made of intolerable selfishness, against which the best efforts of self-improvement usually clash. He has the right to effective help — which is neither charity nor the crumbs of justice — so that he may have access to the development to which his human dignity and status as a son of God give him a right.

Therefore, it is necessary to act quickly and with intensity. It is necessary to effect bold transformations which are profoundly innovative. It is necessary to initiate, without delay, urgent agricultural reforms.

It cannot be forgotten that adequate means must be used. The Church does defend the legitimate right to private property, but it teaches with no less clarity that, above all, private property always carries with it a social obligation, so that material possessions may serve the general goal that God intended. And if the common good requires it, there must be no doubt about expropriation itself, carried out in the proper manner.

The agricultural world has great importance and great dignity; it is that which offers society the products necessary for its nourishment. It is work that deserves the appreciation and grateful esteem of all, a recognition of the dignity of those who work the land.

It is a dignity that can and must be increased in the contemplation of a God who is found in contact with nature, in reflection of the divine action, who takes care of the grass of the field, makes it grow, nourishes it, nurtures the land, sending the rain and the wind, so that it gives food, too, to animals who help man, as we read in the opening chapters of Genesis.

The work of the land involves no small hardship because of the effort it requires, because of the disparagement with which at times it is viewed, or because of the obstacles that are encountered and which only long-range action can resolve. Without this, the flight from the rural areas to the cities will continue, frequently creating problems of extended and painful unemployment and overcrowding of people in housing unworthy of human habitation, etc.

One bad thing, which is fairly widespread, is the tendency among the rural workers to be individualistic when it would be more helpful to act in a more coordinated and cooperative way. Think about this, dear sons.

In spite of all that, the rural world possesses enviable human and religious richness: a deep love of family, a sense of friendship, help to the needy, deep humanity, love of peace and community, religious awareness, confidence and openness with God, cultivation of the love of the Virgin Mary and many other virtues.

It is a deserving tribute of recognition that the pope wishes to express to you and which society owes you. Thank you, farmers, for your valuable contribution to the welfare of society.

Humanity owes you much. You can feel proud of your contributions to the common good.

For those of you who are responsible for the welfare of nations, powerful classes which at times keep the land unproductive and hide the bread which so many families lack: Human conscience, the conscience of the nations, the cry of the deprived and above all the voice of God, the voice of the Church, repeats with me: It is not just, it is not human, it is not Christian for certain clearly unjust situations to continue. It is necessary to put into practice methods which are realistic and effective at the local, national and international levels, in the broad line set forth in the encyclical Mater et Magistra.

Beloved brothers and sons: Work to improve your human life. But don't stop there. Make yourselves ever more worthy morally and religiously. Do not harbor feelings of hate or violence, but rather gaze toward the Lord of all, who to each one gives the reward which his acts deserve. The Church is with you and encourages you to live as sons of God, united to Christ under the gaze of our Blessed Mother.

The pope asks your prayers and offers you his. And as he blesses you and your families, he takes leave of you with the words of the apostle St. Paul: "Take a greeting to all your brothers with a sacred kiss." May this be a call of hope. So be it.

## More Opinions

### 'Daffodil' Mass Is Hope Plea

Editor:

The Insights in Liturgy column by Father Kennedy appearing in last week's issue (C-J 1/31/79) certainly makes a valid point in stating that "the liturgy is a celebration of the mysteries of the faith, not a classroom for instruction."

However, in seeking for examples to buttress his argument against thematic Masses, he refers to "Daffodil (cancer

prevention) Masses." I presume he refers to the Liturgy of Hope Mass that has been held for the past two years at Corpus Christi on Daffodil Sunday, the Sunday of the year designated by the American Cancer Society as the occasion for inspiring hope in those suffering from cancer, in the families of those afflicted, and in those who care for the sick. To refer to this as a "Daffodil Mass" and to couple it with "Human Development Masses" (whatever they are) is an affront to the many people who have been associated with this

effort to bring the Gospel message into the real lives of real human persons today.

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### King Holiday - Who Needs It?

Editor:

Your call for yet another national holiday, this time to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,

shows a good deal more enthusiasm than common sense. Dr. King's death was a national tragedy, and his name will always live in reverent esteem. But another holiday — our country needs one like a hole in the head. Dr. King would be more likely to encourage all Americans to work harder to increase productivity and restore our nation to economic health, and not to make use of his name as another demagogic excuse for goofing off.

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