

By Work We Share in God's Creation

Following is the text of Pope John Paul II's homily given during Mass Feb. 16 in the cathedral of Lagos, Nigeria.

"I am with you always." These words of our risen savior Jesus Christ, taken from today's gospel reading, have a special meaning for us as we gather here this morning to praise his name and to celebrate his eucharist. Christ is with us. Through faith and the waters of baptism he has found a dwelling place in our hearts. He comes to us through his word and under the appearances of bread and wine. By God's grace, we have become living temples of the Holy Spirit, citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.



In the first reading of today's liturgy, the prophet Zechariah tells us of a plea which rises up from the nations: "We want to go with you, since we have learnt that God is with you." Is not this plea still heard today? Are there not many people in every nation on earth who deep in their hearts long to know the Lord and be close to him? We cannot be deaf to their petition. For it is to you and me, to every one of us, that it is directed. We have come to know the Lord and have been invited to dwell in his house. Now in our turn we must share our faith with others, so that they too may come to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, that he is Lord and that he is with us always. Through us the Lord wills to extend his salvation: "I have made you a light for the nations, so that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth."

I would now like to direct my words to those members of the Church in Nigeria who are industrialists and workers, employers and employees. You are playing a vital role in the life of your nation, and people expect much of you. The Church too looks to you with great hope. She knows that you are able to give a powerful witness to the Gospel in the places where you work and among all those people associated with you in the service of humanity.

People who work enjoy a God-given dignity. God could have created everything on earth in its final form, but he decided differently. For God wants us to be associated with him in the improvement of the things he has made. By our work we share in God's own creative activity. It was the same with Christ himself in his human nature. As I stated in my last encyclical:

"The eloquence of the life of Christ is unequivocal: He belongs to the 'working world,' he has appreciation and respect for human work. It can indeed be said that he looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father."

Work is also man's way of helping his neighbor. One person's work affects another person, and together workers help to build up the whole of society. Those who work can say: When we work conscientiously, we make a real contribution toward a better world. Our work is an act of solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

All who work, whether they are single or married, well-skilled or not, have important rights and responsibilities. For example, each one has the right to proper pay and to reasonable working hours, including time for holidays. And work should never hinder the exercise of one's religious freedom. Work is for man, not man for work. So work must not be allowed to dehumanize the person who does the work.

Between employer and employees there can sometimes arise cases of misunderstanding. These are to be resolved, not by violence, harsh words, and antagonisms, but by mutual respect, willingness to listen and patient dialogue. Workers have the right to form unions and to ask for proper working conditions. But they also have the obligation to render loyal service, and employers have the right to receive the services for which they pay. Workers should not too readily have recourse to strikes, which generally cause much suffering to many; strikes remain extraordinary measures for the defense of human rights.

“*Work should never hinder the exercise of one's religious freedom. Work is for man, not man for work.*”

As employers and employees, as industrialists and workers, you can and must serve your country by vigorous efforts at economic development. Your country is richly gifted by God with agricultural and mineral resources. Use them to the best advantage of all, especially the poor, the orphans, the sick, the handicapped, the old and those who are overtaken in the struggle for economic betterment. Do nothing to sabotage the economy of your own country. Nothing can replace diligent, efficient and honest hard work on your part.

Some people are unemployed because they rush to the big cities and do not want to cultivate the land. Help is needed therefore to modernize agricultural methods and to install such facilities as water, electricity and telephones in the rural areas, so that the young can be persuaded to stay on the land.

Some people are unemployed because they were not adequately trained or because their expectations of the type of work they want are not fulfilled. Competent and dedicated economists, government planners and sociologists are needed to help solve these problems.

My words today are especially for you, industrialists and workers, employers and employees, all brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ. Each of you has a vital task to carry out in the mission of the Church, a task which you carry out in the toil and labor of your ordinary working lives. Side by side with your fellow workers, you share in the creative activity of God, you forge bonds of fraternity and friendship and, like the yeast of the Gospel, in quiet but effective ways, you further the kingdom of God.

Through your work and through the holiness of life that comes from doing God's will, you are able to make a big contribution to the Church's mission of proclaiming the good news to the whole world.

Where do you find the strength for this mission? What is the source of your inspiration? It is always Christ. Remember the words of the Gospel: "I am with you always." Yes, Christ is with us, especially in the Eucharist. And this morning, in his sacrifice, Christ offers us and all our work to his Father in heaven. In this way he gives an ever deeper value to all work. He gives a whole new meaning to our lives. In Jesus Christ our savior and our lord, and in his Eucharist, we find the source of our strength and the cause of our joy.

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