

THE POPE

'Szczesc Boze' to Workers of Poland

Katowice, Poland (NC) — Following is excerpted from the English translation released by the Vatican of Pope John Paul II's Polish-language talk at a Marian celebration honoring the Madonna of Piekary at the Muchowiec Airport in Katowice last month.

This meeting has taken the form of a great prayer of the Church of Katowice. This prayer has been going on since the last Sunday of May, when the image of Our Lady of Piekary began to move towards today's meeting, visiting the various parishes along the road. And here today — in this airport — the prayer goes on since this morning, accompanying the arrival of the image of Piekary Slaskie. First of all, there is the praying of the rosary — and together with it there are the readings, meditations and the singing, according to the program planned, agreed upon and carried out with characteristic Silesian precision.

Here I join in the great prayer that continues not only from the last Sunday of May, not only from this morning — but that goes on for generations, that fills every year, every week and every day.

Once — when the Silesia of today did not yet exist, but the image of the Mother of God at Piekary already did — the king of Poland John III Sobieski joined in this prayer, on his way to the rescue of Vienna.

Today, as bishop of Rome and, at the same time, ~~son~~ of the Polish nation, I wish to join in the prayer of today's Silesia which fixed its glance on the image of Our Lady of Piekary as on the image of the mother of justice and of social love.

And so it is. To get at the very root of human work — be it work in industry or work on the land, the hard work of the miner, the metal worker, or that of an office worker, or the busy life of a mother at home, or the labors of a health-care worker with the sick — to get at the very root of any human work, one must relate to God: "Szczesc Boze!" (May God help you!)

With this greeting, "Szczesc Boze," we address ourselves to the working man, and at the same time, we put his work in God's hands.

We put human work, first of all, in the hands of God the creator. In fact, the very work of creation (that is, the drawing from nothing of the existence of the cosmos) is presented in the Book of Genesis as the "work" of God, divided in six "days of creation." After these days, God stopped his work on the seventh day (cf. Gen. 2:2); and with that the Sacred Scriptures impose also on man the obligation of rest, the duty of giving the holy day to God.

Human work is related to God the creator. In fact, God, who creates man in his own image and likeness, gave him the command to subdue the earth. This biblical expression is a description of work that is especially profound and rich in content. Upon the analysis of these biblical words, which are already contained in the Book of Genesis, I based a considerable amount of the encyclical, "Laborem Exercens," which I dedicated to human work two years ago.

When at work we mutually greet each other with the expression, "Szczesc Boze," we express in this way our good will towards our neighbor who is working and, at the same time, we put his work in the hands of God the creator, God the redeemer.

To save man, the Son of God was made man in the womb of the Virgin Mary of Nazareth by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ redeemed us through his cross and resurrection, becoming obedient even unto death. The work of the redemption embraces the whole earthly life of the Son of God, his messianic mission joined to the proclamation of the Gospel — and, before that, the 30 years of hidden life which from the beginning were dedicated to working in the shop beside Joseph of Nazareth. And so the gospel of work is imprinted in the word of divine revelation, which the Church reads again and again, and proclaims anew to all people. To work, in fact, is man's fundamental vocation on this earth.

I speak of this subject in the year that celebrates the extraordinary jubilee of the redemption. This year the whole Church wishes to draw its spiritual strength in an especially deep way from the mystery of the redemption. The working man is also called to unite himself, by means of his own work, to Christ the redeemer of the world, who was a "working man," too.

All this rich meaning is contained in the words "Szczesc Boze!" which are intoned so frequently in Poland and especially in Silesia. To Christ, to the gospel of work, to the mystery of the redemption, we draw closer through Mary: through her, who in her shrine at Piekary, is united to entire generations of workers in Silesia; precisely through Mary, whom you invoke here in Silesia as mother of justice and of social love.

Human work really is at the heart of all social life. Through it justice and social love are formed, if the whole working sector is governed by a just moral order. But if this order is missing, injustice takes the place of justice and love is replaced by hatred.

Invoking Mary as mother of justice and social love — dear brothers and sisters, as workers of Silesia and of all Poland — you wish to express how close to your heart is that moral order that should govern the working sector.

The entire world has followed, and continues to follow with emotion the events that took place in Poland before December 1981. The thing that in a special way gave public opinion cause to reflect was the fact that in these events it was a question, above all, of the moral order itself in relation to human work, and not only the question of an

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increase in salary. Also striking was the fact that these events were free from violence, that no one was killed or wounded through them. And finally there was the fact that these events of the Polish labor world in the 1980s bore within them a religious mark too.

No one can be surprised then that here in Silesia — in this great "work basin" — the mother of Christ is venerated as mother of justice and social love.

The precise meaning of justice and social love is the fullness of the moral order, in connection with the entire social system and, in particular, the system of human work.

Work derives its fundamental value from the fact that it is performed by man. The dignity of work is based on this too, a dignity which must be respected independently of the type of work that man performs. What is essential is that man performs it. Whatever work he performs, he imprints on it the mark of his person: of his image and likeness to God himself. It is also of importance that man performs his work for someone, for others.

Work is man's obligation, both before God, and before people, before his own family and before the nation, before the society to which he belongs.

Corresponding to this obligation of work are also the rights of the workers, which must be formulated within the extensive context of human rights. Social justice consists in the realization of and respect for the rights of man, in relation to all the members of a given society.

Against this background, those rights that concern the work performed by man acquire a fitting eloquence. I shall not enter into details, but I shall name only the most important ones. First of all, the right to a just salary — just, which means enough for the family to live on, too. Then, the right to security in case of an accident on the job. And still further the right to a day of rest.

Joined to the area of workers' rights is also the question of trade unions. I quote what I wrote about this matter in the encyclical, "Laborem Exercens": "The modern unions grew up from the struggle of the workers — workers in general but especially the industrial workers — to protect their just rights vis-a-vis the entrepreneurs and the owners

of the means of production. Their task is to defend the existential interest of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned. The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies. Obviously, this does not mean that only industrial workers can set up associations of this type. Representatives of every profession can use them to ensure their own rights. Thus there are unions of agricultural workers and of white-collar workers... They are a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice, for the just rights of working people in accordance with their individual professions" (no. 20).

And here in Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski said: "It is a question of a people's right to free association; it is not a right conceded by someone, since it is a properly innate right. Hence this right is not given to us by the state. The state has the obligation only to protect and guard it so that it is not violated. This right is given by the creator who made man as a social being. From the creator comes the social character of human aspirations, the need to join together and to unite one with another" (Discourse, Feb. 6, 1982).

It was in this spirit that I spoke in January 1981 during an audience granted to the delegation of Solidarnosc (Solidarity), accompanied by the representative of the Polish government for permanent working contacts with the Holy See.

So then, the discussion that has been going on in Poland in recent years has a deep moral sense. It cannot be resolved in any other way than through a true dialogue between the authorities and society. The bishops of Poland many times during this period have called for such a dialogue.

Why do the workers in Poland — and, for that matter, workers all over the world — have a right to such a dialogue? Because the worker is not only an instrument of production, but also a subject who has priority over capital in the whole production process. Through his work, man is the true administrator of the work bench, of the work process, of the products of work and of their distribution. He is even ready to make sacrifices when he feels that he is truly co-responsible and can have influence on the just distribution of what has been produced overall.

We turn to Mary as the mother of social justice, praying that these fundamental principles of the social order — upon which depends the true sense of human work as well as the sense of man's existence — will become the real substance of social life on our earth. In fact, man is not willing to work when he does not see the sense of his work, when this meaning is not transparent; or when it is taken away from him.

At the same time we call upon Mary as the mother of social love. By putting into practice the principles of social justice, that love of which Christ spoke to his disciples becomes possible: "A new commandment I give you: that you love one another" (Jn. 13:34).

Love is greater than justice. And social love is greater than social justice. If it is true that justice must prepare the terrain for love, then an even greater truth is that only love can guarantee the fullness of justice.



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