



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO KOREA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,  
SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THAILAND **ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II**  
**TO WORKERS** *Suyang Military Airport of Pusan (Korea)*

*Saturday, 5 May 1984 Brothers and Sisters,* you occupy a special place in the heart of the Church. What was Jesus himself but a worker? When he first began to teach, people were amazed, saying: "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? . . . Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (*Marc. 6, 2-3*).<sup>1</sup> The Son of God became man and worked with human hands. *Work*, then, has a dignity of its own in *God's plan for creation*. We hear in the very first page of the Book of Genesis that man was created "in the image of God . . . male and female". Entrusting the whole universe to him, God told him to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (*Gen. 1, 27-28*). So we know, not only by reason alone but through Revelation, that by his work man shares in the Creator's work. He continues it and, in a sense, perfects it by his own work, by his toil, by his daily effort to wrest a livelihood from the earth, of from the sea, or to apply his energies to the many different processes of production. How noble is this mission that only man - by his work - can realize! Indeed, we Christians are convinced that the achievements of the human race - in art, science, culture and technology - are *a sign of God's greatness* and the flowering of his own mysterious design.<sup>2</sup> Jesus himself gave particular emphasis to this truth: that through his work man shares in the activity of the Creator. For Jesus was himself a working man, a craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth. *Jesus clearly belonged to the "working world"*. So did most of his disciples and listeners: ordinary fishermen, farmers and workers. So when he speaks about the Kingdom of God, Jesus constantly uses terms connected with human work: the work of the shepherd, the farmer, the doctor, the sower, the householder, the servant, the steward, the fisherman, the merchant, the laborer. And he compares the building up of God's Kingdom to the mutual work of harvesters and fishermen. From Jesus' own teaching we can clearly see that *man who works is much more important than the product of his work*. Human work comes from man; it is intended to benefit man, to promote his God-given dignity. Even the biggest city, the most complicated computer, the greatest nation, is only something made by man and is meant to serve man, to benefit man. Never the other way around. That is why the Second Vatican Council, speaking of the value of human work, declares: "A person is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that people do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, and a more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 35).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, *this order of values* is not always respected, Today's society, so taken up with developing a one-sided materialistic civilization, often treats work as a special kind of merchandise. Man is often treated as a mere instrument of production, like a material tool that should cost as little as possible while producing the maximum. In these cases the worker is not respected as a true collaborator of the Creator. Unfortunately, *the whole issue of work* has often been looked at from the viewpoint of *conflict between "capital" and "labor"*: a conflict that has vast social, ideological and political implications.

This conflict has been a great tragedy for humanity and a source of suffering for untold millions of individual human beings and families (Cf. Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Laborem Exercens*, 11). I well realize that the relationship between employers and employees in the context of your *Korean cultural and social traditions* has its own special characteristics, and that it is not true that the way to better relationships is to be found in a simplistic application of standards and methods devised elsewhere. Still less by imposing alien ideological systems which have allowed flagrant injustices to persist, or have created new ones, threatening the very peace of the world. Justice requires that ways be found to give workers a *greater share* in the organizational aspects of production and in profits, and I am pleased to know that initiatives have been taken in this direction. Justice also requires that the workers themselves benefit from the success of the enterprise in which they work, and that they have the satisfaction of knowing that through diligent and conscientious work they are thereby contributing to the social development of their country.<sup>4</sup> Of course, we know that work is not all fulfillment and satisfaction. Yes, *work involves toil and struggle* and you have all experienced this. Work has been profoundly affected by sin, as we read in the Book of Genesis: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread . . .". That is why we can never fathom the full meaning of work without looking to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ in which he conquered sin and transformed all work. His work, his suffering, his obedience unto death receive their full meaning in his Resurrection: this is the "gospel of work" contained in the life and teaching of our Redeemer. And so we Christians find in human work a small share in *the Cross of Jesus Christ*. We must learn to live this human experience with Christ's attitude. By uniting our work with the mission of our Savior, we help bring about the *new earth* where justice dwells, and we contribute mightily to the coming of the Kingdom of God. Dear workers, farmers and fishermen, I realize that, in solidarity with your millions of fellow workers, you have had to suffer much and are continuing to suffer for the birth of this "new earth" in your land. Often in the face of indifference, misunderstanding, and even harassment, you have, as Christians consciously committed to promoting the rights and welfare of fellow workers and farmers, patiently and bravely borne the cross. All of us must work together in fraternal love to show that *a more just sharing of the world's goods* means access to these goods especially through a just wage. Take heart from the words of the Gospel! The Beatitudes and the woes you have just heard are the very words of *the Lord appealing on behalf of the poor and oppressed* against every form of injustice and social and personal selfishness. Take courage, "for the Kingdom of God is yours!". And as you rightly demand justice for your cause and for your lives, make sure that your own "works of faith" always promote justice for your neighbor.<sup>5</sup> Beloved brothers and sisters of Korea, my friends: you do indeed have a special place in the heart of Jesus and of his Church. I know that the proportion of Christians among industrial workers, farmers and fishermen is small: herein lies a great challenge for the shepherds of the Church in Korea and for yourselves. Be certain that the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, the carpenter of Nazareth, can supply answers to the doubts and questions of working men and women. Only Jesus Christ can sustain your hopes and dispel your anxieties. He alone can show you the meaning of your daily toil. In his name and together with his Church continue, through peaceful and upright means, to pursue human dignity, promote human rights and create a better world for yourselves, your children and your children's children. May Jesus bless your work! May he bless your families and friends, and give you his peace in overflowing measure! And through his grace may all your activities be linked to prayer, so that you may bring forth abundant "works of faith" leading to justification and eternal life. © Copyright 1984 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana