



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

HOMILY

Monday, 14 June 1999, Sosnowiec

1. Beloved Brothers and Sisters! I give thanks to Divine Providence that the young Diocese of Sosnowiec is part of my pilgrimage through our homeland. I wanted to visit this region. I very much wanted to meet the People of God of Zagłębie, and today my wish is granted. I thank Bishop Adam and Auxiliary Bishop Piotr and the whole local community of the Church for the invitation and the warm welcome. I cordially greet the visiting Bishops, the priests, the religious, the representatives of the local authorities and all the faithful gathered here and those who are with us spiritually.

Today's meeting reminds me of the celebrations which we held here at Sosnowiec in May 1967. In the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – the present Cathedral – with the participation of the Primate of the Millennium and other Polish Bishops, we celebrated the millennium. Those were difficult times. Difficult especially for those who wanted to profess their faith and their membership in the Church openly. I remember what great meaning the teaching of the recently concluded Second Vatican Council had at that time. I recall the great hope and strength that was brought particularly by the Council's teaching on the dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights. It reached deep into souls prepared for the millennium by the great novena. Today times have changed. This is a great gift of Divine Providence. We owe to God our gratitude for all that he has done in our homeland. May thanksgiving rise always in the hearts of believers in Poland!

2. *“O praise the Lord, all you nations,
acclaim him all you peoples!
Strong is his love for us;
he is faithful for ever” (Ps 116:1-2)*

With these words, the Psalmist exhorts all nations to praise God. The Chosen People had a particular reason for praise. Moses says: "The Lord your God has blessed you in all the works of your hands; he knows your going through this great wilderness; these forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you lacked nothing" (*Deut 2:7*). In a sense, all the peoples and nations of the earth shared in this journeying of Israel. Although few periods of history – because of the exceptional population shifts that took place then, especially in continental Europe – are known as "times of a great exodus of peoples", the fact is that even when life is settled man never ceases to be a pilgrim, and nations are always journeying in space and time.

The pilgrimage of the history of each nation leaves as a legacy the fruit of human work. At the dawn of history, God entrusted the earth to men, so that they might subdue it (cf. *Gen 1:28*). Man found the earth to be a terrain needing to be ordered creatively. Gradually he transformed it, giving it a new face. He began to cultivate it, to build upon it, creating settlements, villages, cities. Thus man showed that he was a being in the likeness of God, a being to whom had been given the capacity not only to know the truth but also to create beauty.

As we approach the year 2000, we look back upon all the different phases of this journey made through the centuries by our forebears. They have left us a great heritage of creative work which today fills us with admiration and gratitude. Their hard toil and the works of past generations are a challenge for us to continue to rule over this land which the Creator has given to us as a possession and a task.

Accepting the invitation of the ages, we cannot forget the divine perspective of sharing in the work of creation, which confers upon all human effort true meaning and dignity. Without this perspective, work can easily lose its subjective dimension. When this happens, the man who does the work is no longer important, and all that matters is the material worth of what is produced. Man is no longer regarded as a craftsman, as one who creates, but as an instrument of production.

It seems that in this time of necessary economic changes in our country, signs of such a danger have appeared. Two years ago, I spoke of this at Legnica. Because of the laws of the market, human rights are forgotten; this happens in varying degrees all over the world. It happens, for example, when the claim is made that economic profit justifies taking away the job of someone who loses not only a job but every prospect for maintaining himself or the family. It also happens when, to increase production, the worker is denied the right to rest, the right to care for the family, or the freedom to plan his daily life. This is always the case when the value of work is defined not according to human effort, but according to the price of the product – which creates a situation where the pay does not correspond to the work that is done.

Yet it must also be said that this concerns not only employers but also employees. The one who accepts a job can also give in to the temptation to treat it as an object, as no more than a source of material enrichment. The job can dominate a man's life to the point where he no longer notices

his need to look after his health, the development of his personality, the happiness of his loved ones or in the end his relationship with God.

I mention this today in order to awaken consciences. The structures of the State and the economy have an influence on attitudes towards work, but the dignity of work depends upon the human conscience. It is here that it is given its ultimate value. In the conscience the voice of the Creator is heard incessantly, a voice pointing to what is the true good for man and the world entrusted to him. Those who have lost the right judgement of conscience can transform the blessing of work into a curse.

Wisdom is needed to discover ever anew the supernatural dimension of work, given as a task to man by the Creator. A correctly formed conscience is needed to discern the absolute value of one's work. A spirit of sacrifice is needed lest our own humanity and the happiness of others are lost on the altar of well-being.

3. "By the labour of your hands you shall eat; you will be happy and prosper" (*Ps 127:2*). I pray to God with all my heart that these words of the Psalm will become today and always a message of hope for all those in Zagłębie, in Poland and throughout the world who take up the daily task of subduing the earth. I pray still more fervently that these words will bring hope to the hearts of those who very much want to work but have the misfortune to be unemployed. I pray to God that the economic development of our country and of other countries in the world may proceed in such a way that all people – as Saint Paul says – may "work in quietness and . . . earn their own living" (*2 Th 3:12*). I raise my voice in saying this because I want you to realize – I want every worker in this country to know – that the Pope and the Church are interested in your problems.

4. "The Lord your God has blessed you in all the works of your hands; he knows your going through this great wilderness" (*Deut 2:7*) – for centuries the Church has borne these words of the Book of Deuteronomy as a message of hope. If man can discern in the work of his hands the sign of God's blessing, he will have no doubt that this same God exists – is near – and cares constantly for man's journey, especially when he crosses the great wilderness of daily problems and nagging worries. There is a need today for the service of hope, which up to this time the Church in Poland has carried out so well. Man needs witness to the presence of God! Man today, especially the worker, needs a Church that bears this witness with new force. Times change, men and circumstances change, new problems emerge. The Church cannot ignore these changes and must accept the challenges which they present. Man is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way of her daily life and her experience, of her mission and her labours. Therefore the Church of our time must be aware of all that seems opposed to this, so that "human life [may] be ever more human and . . . every element of this life [may] correspond to man's true dignity – in a word, she must be aware of all that is opposed to that process" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14).

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters!

We learn this sensitivity towards man and his problems by looking to the life and service of the Patron of your Diocese, Saint Albert Chmielowski, and to the Servant of God Mother Teresa Kierocinska, called Mother of Zaglebie. With sensitivity they discovered the suffering and bitterness of those who could not find their proper place within the social and economic structures of the time and they brought help to the most needy. The programme that they outlined is always relevant. Even at the end of the twentieth century they teach us that we cannot close our eyes to the misery and suffering of those who cannot find their place in the often complicated new reality. May every parish become a community of people sensitive to the fate of those who find themselves in a difficult situation. Search always for new ways to meet this challenge. Let the words of the Scripture be an encouragement for everyone: "You shall give freely to [the needy], and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake" (cf. *Deut* 15:10).

The message concerning the presence of God in human history needs to be taken especially to the young. They need this certainty. It alone will enable them to discover new perspectives for the creative fulfilment of their own human lives in a time of change. I am glad that the Church in Poland is taking on the work of education in its different dimensions. May the opportunity given to young people to perfect their abilities produce its fruits! Upon such a foundation, may ingenuity flourish and new and good initiatives emerge in every area of life.

The Church's witness through works of mercy and teaching cannot, however, take the place of what is done by the people and institutions responsible for shaping of the world of work. Therefore, one of the Church's most important tasks in this field is the formation of human consciences, a formation requiring the utmost tact and discretion, with a view to imparting to everyone a sensitivity to these problems. Only when this fundamental truth is active in the conscience of each person – the truth that man is both subject and creator, and that work must serve the good of the person and society – only then will it be possible to avoid the dangers that come with practical materialism. The world of work needs people with properly formed consciences. The world of labour expects the Church to serve consciences.

6. Shortly, we shall crown the famous image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help of Jaworzno, from Osiedle Stale. This gesture has a special eloquence. On the one hand, it is a sign of the working people of Zaglebie. Because of their devotion to Mary, because they constantly entrust to her the today and tomorrow of the Church, this faith is kept safe in the hearts of workers, despite the many trials they have undergone, especially in the last fifty years. On the other hand, this act of crowning is a confirmation of the fact that the community of believers in Jaworze and all of Zaglebie truly experiences the special presence of Mary, thanks to whom human aspirations rise before God and divine grace descends upon men.

May Our Lady of Perpetual Help be for you a guide along the paths of the new millennium! May she help you unceasingly on your pilgrimage to the house of the heavenly Father.

And may the love of God the Father, God the Creator and Lord, transform the hearts and minds of all those who with their work subdue the earth. Amen.

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