



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**MASS FOR WORKERS**

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II***

*Ranchi*

*Monday, 3 February 1986*

1. "Before the mountains were born / or the earth or the world brought forth, / you are God, without beginning or end" .

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Together with all of you, I wish to adore God the Creator: God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. I wish to adore him on India soil. I wish to adore him here in this vast country which stretches from the towering Himalayas in the North to the Malabar and Coromandel coasts in the South. I wish to adore the Creator here in Ranchi, with all of you from Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and from the Kingdom of Nepal. In a particular way, I join in praise and worship with the millions and millions of workers in India: with every man and woman who works in the fields, in the mines, in the factories, in the workshops, in the offices, in the homes, in the remote villages as well as in the urban centres. At this Eucharist in Ranchi, we join our voices and hearts to adore our God who is without beginning or end.

2. The Psalmist proclaims the eternity of God when he sings: "To your eyes a thousand years are like yesterday, come and gone, no more than a watch in the night" .

God is eternal, he is eternity itself. Yet he does not remain separated from us or inaccessible to us. He is the Creator of the world: from him everything has taken its beginning. He is the Creator of man. And to us human beings who are mortal and subject to decay in our bodies, God speaks

in these words: "Go back, sons of men" . And yet God invites every person whom he has created in his own image and likeness to become a sharer in his life, his wisdom and his eternity.

Hence each man and woman is a pilgrim on this earth – -a pilgrim of the Absolute, a pilgrim in search of the Absolut! And each one is called. We are all pilgrims, members of the People of God whom the Creator and Father leads towards his own holiness. He leads us to himself through the experiences and the trials of the present life.

3. In order to teach us the way of living that leads to union with God, the Father has given us his Son. He has made him the cornerstone, so that we may grow towards salvation . For in him, in Jesus Christ, we too become living stones "built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" .

These spiritual sacrifices are linked with everything that makes up our life. In a particular way they are linked with human work, for work is a basic dimension of human life on earth.

4. Today I would like to reflect with you on the value and dignity of human work. Jesus Christ was a carpenter's son. He worked for the greater part of his life on earth in the same trade as his foster father, Joseph. By working, Jesus proclaimed in the ordinary activities of his daily life the dignity of work. All human work is a participation in the activity of the Creator himself. Whether we work in a factory, an office or a hospital, or in the fields, or as a rickshaw driver or as a mother at home – whatever work we do – we all share in the creative activity of God. This gives all work its meaning and worth. "The basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person" . It follows from this that all human work, however humble it may appear, must be fully respected, protected and justly remunerated, so that families and indeed the whole community may live in peace, prosperity and progress.

5. Work brings joy and fulfilment, but it also entails toil and fatigue. The fulfilment and joy spring from the fact that human work enables men and women to exercise that mastery over the earth which God has entrusted to them . For God said to the first man and woman: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" .

The work we do, however, may not be the type of work we would prefer, or it may be hazardous, such as work deep down in the mines. The work may be hard, monotonous condition. It is written in the Bible that because of disobedience man will earn his bread by the sweat of his brow and that the land upon which he labours will not easily yield its fruits . Yet for a worker who places his trust in God, the toil and fatigue of work is accompanied by the joy of knowing that he or she is collaborating with the Creator.

6. For those of us who are Christians, Jesus is the perfect model and inspiration for our work. In

his work, Jesus remained in deep communion with his heavenly Father. We should therefore consider carefully how Jesus faithfully performed his daily work during the many years of his life in Nazareth. This is a powerful example for all of us. The witness of Jesus in his work as a carpenter fills us with joy and encourages us to persevere in our humble service to humanity.

Furthermore, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we must never forget the reason why Jesus came into the world. Jesus came to accomplish the work of salvation. And how did he accomplish the work of salvation? Through his suffering and death on the Cross and by the victory of his glorious Resurrection. All human work, no matter how insignificant it may seem, shares in this work of salvation. As I stated in my Encyclical on Human Work: "By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ Crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity. He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the Cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform" .

7. The Church, seeking to be faithful to the example and witness of Christ, has a very special concern for the welfare of workers. The well-known Encyclicals of the Popes starting with *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII have continually defended the right of the worker to a just wage and to proper working conditions. The Church's teaching is founded on the principle that every human person is created in the image of God and has a unique God-given dignity. Thus no one should be used as a mere instrument for production, as though the person were a machine or a beast of burden. The Church rejects any social or economic system that leads to the depersonalisation of workers. Over and above her concern for proper working conditions, the Church insists on a just wage for workers, a wage that takes into account the needs of their family. "Just remuneration for the work of an adult who is responsible for a family means remuneration which will suffice for establishing and properly maintaining a family and for providing security for its future" .

My heart goes out in a special way to the many unemployed who want to work but are unable to find suitable employment, at times because of discrimination based on religion, caste, community or language. Unemployment and underemployment give rise to frustration and a feeling of uselessness, and cause disharmony in the family; they bring anguish and untold hardships and weaken the very fabric and structure of society. They threaten the dignity of every man and woman. There is an urgent need to take fresh initiatives to solve this grave problem, and these initiatives often require collaboration on the national and international level. And it is crucially important that the negotiations and plans to overcome unemployment be marked by respect and dialogue between the employers and those seeking work.

8. At this Mass today, I am pleased to wear liturgical vestments which have a particular symbolic meaning for the Catholic people of this part of India. The designs on the chasuble symbolise your belief in the abundant blessings that God the Creator pours out on his people, and they show your faith in the power of God to overcome all evil.

The chasuble and stole are signs of the priesthood: signs of the priestly vocation, character and ministry. Through his ministry of God's word and the sacraments, in particular the Eucharist, the priest reminds all the baptised of everything which the first reading of this Mass so splendidly expresses: " You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" .

And since you are God's chosen ones, you must proclaim the wonderful works of God. You must proclaim the wonderful works of God the Creator through everything that is the result and fruit of human work. Precisely for this reason we bring to the altar the fruits of human work and we offer them in sacrifice.

9. God has "called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" .

Yes, he has called us all in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the light. Indeed, he is "the way, and the truth, and the life" . And so he can lead us to the Father, to this God who is light and truth and holiness itself. Jesus calls us and invites us to share in his own divine life – through everything which makes up our earthly existence, through all the toil of our human work.

Accepting the light which is in Christ, we too must become "the light of the world" . We have to become "the salt of the earth" . which gives taste to human life.

As followers of Christ, you are called to be the light of Christ here in India and with Christ to transform the world. Let your work serve the good of your neighbour. Share with the underprivileged, the sick and the handicapped. Strive to remove everything that oppresses people, and working together do all you can to solve the unemployment situation. Wherever you are, seek to radiate the presence of Christ: in your families, before your children, in your place of work, through the joyful practice of the virtues you have found in Jesus.

In this great nation, against the background of the ancient heritage of India, I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to accept these words that Christ speaks to you today, just as he once spoke them to his first listeners and disciples: " Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" .

Sons and daughters of the great Indian motherland, accept these words! You are the Church of the Living God in this most ancient land, through which have passed so many generations languages and civilisations. Accept these words!

They are the words of Jesus Christ. It is the Redeemer, of the world who speaks, who tells you: "You are the light of the world"! "You are the salt of the earth"! And he is the "cornerstone" of our salvation; he is the cornerstone of our life in God! Amen.

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