

## CHURCH'S FEELING FOR WORKING MAN\*

The first of May, the feast of Work!

What a great subject of study and speech!

A topical, fundamental, constitutional theme, which concerns human activity fully! (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 33, ss.)

A fruitful topic, covering history, science, technique, economy, sociology, morality, politics, culture and civilization.

It is an anthropological, theological, spiritual theme, and now, with the appearance of St. Joseph in the midst of the feast of work, a liturgical one.

A central theme, therefore, in the word phenomenon of development and human progress; and therefore a controversial, explosive, resolute theme.

How much talk there has been about it; how much there is still! The Church too, what studies, what documents, what experiments, what efforts and what work she has lavished upon it!

We will just mention this theme, so that, if needs be, you may think about it, and become aware of the interest, the importance and the complexity of the subject that is called work, and understand how it presupposes and at the same time produces a general conception of life. We live in modern times, which more than any others celebrate human activity, which we call work. This study is for you, who are well aware how much the Church nourishes it with doctrine and example.

The time is too short for us to speak about it. And do you know what? If we had to speak about it, we should prefer to speak of the workers, rather than of work itself; that is, of human beings, the persons, engaged in work. Among them we should

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\* This address was delivered by the Pope on 1 May 1972.

choose those who work by hand, I mean carry out the physical toil, rather than those (though they, too, are worthy of our interest) who prepare it with studies and direct it. And here, in this brief moment, it is not with words that we wish to contact the boundless world of Workers, but with another means of social communication, a silent means, which is perhaps not perceptible to everyone: sympathy.

Yes, today we address to all Workers this spiritual and cordial current: sympathy. This wave, invisible in itself and imponderable, has, however, its own reality and its own efficacy. Our sympathy, which is that of the Church, that of declared disciples of the Gospel, is poured forth over Workers; we would like them to know it, and even feel it somehow. A silent voice; but a real voice.

In the environments of labour it is very often the opposite opinion that is prevalent: that the Church has no sympathy for working people, who so often are the people of the lower classes, poor people. The Church, it is said, does not know us, the Church is on the side of the rich, and the powerful. The Church is conservative, the Church preaches the duties of the weak and the rights of the strong. The Church concerns herself with moral and religious values, and takes no interest in economic and temporal values. The Church seeks her interests, her privileges; she is miserly, selfish; she does not think of us, the subordinate, exploited, abandoned Workers.

And when the facts prove the contrary? Then other objections are made to the rightful interpretation of the friendly solidarity of the Church with working people. These working people often doubt and mistrust the benevolent words and gestures of the Church. She does so, people think and say, because she is afraid of the working people. She ingratiates herself with us, some people say, to catch us and to paralyse our claims, or even to exploit our numbers, to deceive our simple uneducated minds, to curb the momentum of our social conquests, now irresistible: or at least to defend the whole castle of religion, in which we no longer believe... And this mistrust often and quickly changes to opposition, hatred, struggle and malediction, alas, as is well known in those countries where atheism prevails and has become a programme. Many other things could be said.

Yet the Church cannot, does not wish to look at the worker, precisely as such, without this inextinguishable sentiment of sympathy. **Whether he wants it or not, whether he knows it**

or not, the Worker is the object of sympathy on the part of the Church of Christ. What does sympathy mean? Oh! It means a great many things, which we all know! It means, in the first place, sharing in the suffering of others; it means moral affinity, it means understanding; it means an inclination to esteem, favor, friendship, service, love.

Does the Church harbour such a sentiment?

Yes, sons and brothers; yes, you know it, all you Workers, who hear the echo of this simple profession of sympathy, of this silent discourse.

If we were to tell you the reasons for this deep sentiment, the discourse would no longer be a silent one, but would be a never-ending one. The Church has sympathy for the Worker, in the first place, because she sees and proclaims his dignity as a man, a brother equal to every other man, an inviolable person on whose face it printed a divine likeness. And this sympathy is all the greater (not all the smaller, mind you!) the more the face bears the marks of want, weakness, suffering, insult, the longing for qualification and liberation. Toil, poverty, insecurity, exploitation, and even perhaps, inferiority, are claims to the sympathy of the Church.

To the many other reasons that call forth from the heart of the Church this sympathy for the innumerable multitude of men, who sweat and suffer because of work, and today wait and demand, we will finally add the following two, which sum them all up. Firstly, Christ too, was a manual worker; he learned to toil in the school of Joseph, he was called "the carpenter's son" (Mk. 6:3), he was the fellow-worker of you all, because he gave his life, his blood, to save everyone. And secondly, Christ's cry still echoes down the centuries and throughout the world: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". (Mt. 11:28).

This is the sympathy of Christ, of the Church, for the working world, even to the present day.

With our Apostolic Blessing.