

MESSAGE TO FARMWORKERS

I bring you greetings from your brothers in Christ here in the Valley. We all pray that in your deliberations you will be open to the voice of God and to the needs of all His people, and that your decisions will reflect that justice and love that should be characteristic of His people at all times, and in all places. I pray that this meeting will be a huge step toward a renewed understanding of the dignity of work and of workers and of the mutual obligations between workers and employers.

The Catholic Church teaches that all persons have a God-given right to band together for their common good, to seek in justice what individual action cannot obtain: for instance, proper salaries and working conditions, adequate housing, sufficient food, and decent education. These are rights with which God our Father had endowed each of His children, no matter where they live. No government or public opinion can take these rights away from them. In recent years in this country, history has shown that often a man can provide properly for his family only after associating himself with his fellow workers in a common effort toward basic justice. This has been a common teaching of our Holy Father and of the Church during this entire century. Surely no American, and especially no Catholic American, can deny this right and still claim oneness with the Church. It is a teaching strongly reiterated by Pope John Paul II during his recent trip to Mexico.

How much more American and Christian it would be if everyone worked long and hard and selflessly to bring about the "bold and innovative changes" (words of our Holy Father John Paul II) in our society that would guarantee that the working man would be adequately reimbursed for his labor. It is too bad that legislators and businessmen refuse to take steps to rectify the conditions that force the poor to extraordinary means in order to have their rights recognized. There is something wrong with America if American know-how and American resources are insufficient to pay just salaries. It is a social sin of our times that great numbers of our people must continue to be poor and to receive less than adequate reimbursement for their work and thus cannot live as decently as their neighbors.

Let us recall, however, that our Holy Father called upon working men and their families not to harbor feelings of hatred and violence which are not in keeping with the Gospels, and which cause many wounds in our society. I join our Holy Father in his recent admonition to all of us:

"To construct this more just world means, among other things, making every effort in order that there will be no children without sufficient food; without education, without instruction; that there will be no young people without preparation; that, in order to live and to develop in a worthy way, there will be no peasants without land; that there will be no

workers ill-treated or deprived of their rights; that there will be no systems that permit the exploitation of man by man or by the State; that there will be no corruption; that there will be no persons living in superabundance, while others through no fault of their own lack everything; that there will not be so many families badly formed, broken, disunited, receiving insufficient care; that there will be no injustice and inequality in the administration of justice; that there will be no one without the protection of the law, and that law will protect all alike; that force will not prevail over truth and law, but truth and law over force; and that economic or political matters will never prevail over human matters. "

As your Bishop in the Valley, I assure you of my daily prayers that God's grace will move the minds and hearts of all Americans, especially those in positions of power and influence to face with you the task of bringing justice to our land and to our people.

Bishop John J. Fitzpatrick
Bishop of Brownsville

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