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DOMUS MARIAE HOTEL, VIA AURELIA 481
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1 Tim 6:6-11, 17-19
Lk 12, 15-21

HOMILY

Today's Gospel parable holds up for us the truth which lies at the heart of rural life, the truth that God our Father has placed into our care the soil, the plants and the animals, for which farmers, as individuals and families, take responsibility for the sake of their own good and for the sake of the good of all their brothers and sisters. In other words, in the work of agriculture, farmers are called to be faithful stewards of God's gifts of food and fiber for all His children.

The rich man in the parable failed to understand the full destiny of the "good harvest" with which God had blessed him as a farmer. Yes, the harvest was meant to provide for his needs, but, what is more, the surplus was meant to provide for the needs of others. The rich man, forgetting the full destiny of the "good harvest," falls into greed, believing himself to be the master of the harvest, instead of the Master's faithful steward.¹

How easy it is for us to forget this truth which is at the foundation of agriculture upon which all life depends! The Church's moral teaching in our time, particularly since the time of Pope Leo XIII, has reminded us repeatedly that the care of the land and plants and animals should be in the hands of God-fearing individuals and families, called to faithful stewardship, so that God's good gifts of food and fiber may serve all His children. Pope Leo XIII, in his Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*, reminded us that private ownership of the land has as its end the good of all, when he wrote:

Moreover, the earth, even though apportioned among private owners, ceases not thereby to

minister to the needs of all, inasmuch as there is not one who does not sustain life from what the land produces.²

¹ Cf. *Lk* 12:16-20.

² "Ceterum utcumque inter privatos distributa, inservire communi omnium utilitati terra non cessat, quoniam nemo est mortalium, quin alatur eo, quod agri efferunt." Leo PP. XIII, Litterae encyclicae *Rerum novarum*, "de conditione opificum", 15 Maii 1891, *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 23, p. 644. English translation: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals, p. 3, no. 8.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* reminded us strongly that God has placed an order in nature which agriculture must respect if it is to serve man as God intends. He wrote:

When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes. In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation.³

Inspired by the Church's teaching, we all have the responsibility to serve the pastoral needs of farmers who are the stewards of the soil and plants and animals for the nourishment and health of us all.

We recognize the danger of the forgetfulness of the rich man in the parable. The wonderful fruits of the land, and the food and fiber which come from the plants and animals must not lead us to greed, to a disordered desire of the money which the sale of these fruits may bring us, but to the love of God who has placed His creatures into our care and made them bountiful in fruit for the good of all His children. We must remember the instruction which the Apostle Paul urges the bishop Timothy to give to the faithful:

Let them trust in the God who provides us richly with all things for our use. Charge them to do good, to be rich in good works and generous, sharing what they have. Thus will they build a secure foundation for the future, for receiving that life which is life indeed.⁴

For the faithful son or daughter of God, closeness to the source of our food and fiber leads to profound gratitude to God and the desire to share the bountiful gifts of His creation with everyone. Care of the land, the plants and the animals, carried out with faith, leads naturally to acts of thanksgiving to God and of solidarity with one's neighbor.

It is with the eyes of faith, with minds and hearts instructed and inspired by God's Word, that we must view the pressing question of the use of technology in agriculture, in the care of God's

³ "Si natura, in primis homo, considerantur veluti fructus casus vel evolutivi determinismi, responsalitates conscientia minuitur nostris in mentibus. In natura credens mirabilem agnoscit exitum divinae creativae interventionis, qua homo scienter uti potest ad legitimas – materiales et immateriales – necessitates explendas, dummodo intrinseca aequilibria ipsius creationis observet. Si visio haec deficit, fit ut homo aut naturam veluti rem vitandam reputet aut econtra eadem abutatur. Uterque agendi modus christianae visioni naturae non congruit, quae fructus est divinae creationis." Benedictus PP. XVI, Litterae encyclicae *Caritas in veritate*, "de humana integra progression in caritate veritateque," 29 Iunii 2009, p. 684, n. 48. English translation: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 80, no. 48.

⁴ *1 Tim* 6:17-19.

creation for the good of all. In every aspect of our life today, we find the presence of technology which promises to make our life easier and our work more profitable. Technology, we are told, means progress for us, a better life and greater economic security. So, too, farmers are told that they must use the ever-developing agricultural technology, including biotechnology, to improve their work, to compete in the marketplace and to increase their profits. The advancement of such technology eliminates the smaller farmer who cannot afford its use and cannot survive the ruthless competition which it flames.

The argument that bigger is better has had its influence in agriculture as in every sector of human activity today. The bigger farmer has the economic infrastructure which permits him to finance the purchase and use of all forms of technology, which will make profits greater for the financing of the use of yet more technology. Of course, there comes an inevitable moment when no farmer or group of farmers can sustain economically the kind of operation which will be demanded. And the solution to that difficulty is already at hand: the transnational corporation which, as one agricultural expert once informed me, does farmers the ultimate favor of making them “nine to five” employees, freeing them from any responsibility for the farm.

The use of technology in agriculture is neither good nor evil in itself. Technology is good when it helps those entrusted with the work of agriculture to be good stewards of God’s creatures, to use God’s creation with respect in order to provide sound food and clothing for all. The moral standard which must guide the use of technology in agriculture is the respectful care of God’s creatures, according to the law which is written in their being, for the good of all. In other words, agricultural technology is good when it helps the farmer to provide sound and healthy produce with respect for the creatures under his care, with respect for himself and his family, and with respect for his neighbor who depends upon him for food and fiber.

Greater convenience and increased profits may result from the right employment of technology, but convenience and profit are not the criteria which make right the use of any technology. Because the very sustenance of life is provided through agriculture, no form of technology which has a possibly harmful effect on the healthiness of agricultural produce or on the sources of continued agricultural produce may be morally employed. As Pope Benedict XVI has reminded us, the soil is not an inert tool, nor are the plants and animals machines; they are living organisms created according to an order which sustains and fosters all life.⁵ They are entrusted into our care as the stewards of the Lord Who alone gives life. Whatever technology we use in their care must respect the order with which God has called His creatures into being and by which He sustains them in being.

⁵ Cf. *Caritas in veritate*, pp. 684-685, n. 48. English translation: pp. 80-81, no. 48.

The parable of the greedy rich man is addressed by Our Lord to us all. Saint Paul's instruction to Timothy about the right stewardship of food and clothing is meant for all of Timothy's flock, is meant for all of us. We are all called to the altar of Christ's sacrifice tonight to give thanks to God for the fruits of His creation and to pray for the grace to be good stewards of His creatures. The Church, faithful to the teaching of the Word of God, instructs us that the care of creation to bring forth food and clothing for all God's children must be in the hands of God-fearing families, of families who know themselves to be stewards of the one Lord of the harvest, of families who know that it is God who creates and sustains all life. The Church teaches that the fonts which sustain our life should be in the care of farm families who understand that what is most important in their work is to praise God and to bring forth from His creation food and clothing for the good of His children. God-fearing families will take the responsibility to use technology rightly and to refuse to use any technology which may compromise the integrity of their labor upon which the health and life of all of us depends.

The teaching of the Holy Scriptures, handed down faithfully in the Church's teaching, is dismissed by many today as unrealistic before the economic forces which are driving the developments in agriculture. For many, it is not a question of whether the Church's teaching is true or not, good or not, but rather a question of embracing an economy which promises an easier life and ever-greater profits, at least for a few. When we dismiss the Church's teaching, we risk the fall of the greedy rich man in the parable, forgetful of who we are before God, thinking that the bountiful harvest is our work and for our profit, instead of the gift of God brought forth with the cooperation of our hands and hearts for the good of all. Our celebration of the Holy Eucharist, if it is sincere, does not permit us to see agriculture other than in the light of the Church's teaching, in the light of what is true and good.

But what can we do before the so-called inevitable economic developments in agriculture? We can transform the direction of agriculture in our society, if we have the mind and heart to work together as stewards of the Lord of the harvest, of the Lord of all life. We are the Church, Christ's Mystical Body, called to witness to God's plan for us and for our world, also in the critical arena of agriculture. We are called to work together, as farmers and as those who depend upon farmers for our food and clothing, to save and to foster agriculture carried out according to God's plan. We are called to promote the technology which helps us to bring forth sound fruits from God's creatures. We are called to take responsibility for agriculture and not to sell our title of stewardship for an easier life or more money.

Today, we witness an ever greater interest in food which is organically produced, an ever greater interest on the part of many to know that their food has not been produced by means of any

harmful or possibly harmful technology. We witness, too, families and groups of families engaging in agriculture to bring forth the healthiest produce, with respect for the environment and according to an economy which provides a living wage for the farmer. Could we not be more active in fostering such farming? We can be certain that, if we are about a sound and healthful care of God's creatures for the good of all, God will bless us.

There will be challenges and disappointments; the temptation of the greedy rich man is real. We are called to overcome the temptations and other forces which would hinder or stop us in doing what is true and good. What is more, we are strengthened by the grace of God to continue the struggle for the transformation of agriculture and to win ultimately the victory, which means life for us during our days as stewards of God's creation and fullness of life when we give the final account of our stewardship.

We will now be united at the altar of Christ's sacrifice. God will give us anew the gift of His life won for us by His Son's sacrifice on the Cross. Let us open our minds and hearts to receive God's grace, the gift of His life, so that we may go forth as good stewards of His harvest, strengthened to make, with Christ, the sacrifices which give life, obedient to the Word which God speaks to us today and everyday:

Charge them to do good, to be rich in good works and generous, sharing what they have. Thus they build a secure foundation for the future, for receiving that life which is life indeed.⁶

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE
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⁶ *1 Tim* 6:18-19.