In the heartland of America, in the middle of the bountiful fields at harvest time, I come to celebrate the Eucharist. As I stand in your presence in this period of autumn harvest, those words which are repeated whenever people gather for the Eucharist seem to be so appropriate: “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, through your goodness we have this bread to offer which earth has given and human hands have made.”

As one who has always been close to nature, let me speak to you today about the land, the earth, and that “which earth has given and human hands have made.”

The land is God’s gift entrusted to people from the very beginning. It is God’s gift, given by a loving Creator as a means of sustaining the life which he had created. But the land is not only God’s gift; it is also man’s responsibility. Man, himself created from the dust of the earth (Genesis 3:7), was made its master (Genesis 1:26). In order to bring forth fruit, the land would depend upon the genius and skillfulness, the sweat and the toil of the people to whom God would entrust it. Thus the life on earth is willed by God to be both that “which earth has given and human hands have made.”

To all of you who are farmers and all who are associated with agricultural production I want to say this: The Church highly esteems your work. Christ himself showed his esteem for agricultural life when he described God his Father as “the vinedresser” (John 15:1). You cooper-ate with the Creator, the “vinedresser,” in sustaining and nurturing life. You fulfill the command of God given at the very beginning: “Fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Here in the heartland of America, the valleys and hills have been blanketed with grain, the herds and the flocks have multiplied many times over. By hard work you have become masters of the earth and you have subdued it. By reason of the abundant fruitfulness which modern agricultural advances have made possi-ble, you support the lives of millions who otherwise do not live on the land, but who live because of what you produce. Mindful of this, I make my own the words of my beloved predecessor Paul VI: “It is the dignity of farm life in every age including our own—these were part of the life of Jesus. Therefore I invite you to let your attitudes always be the same as those of Christ Jesus.”

Three attitudes in particular are appropriate for rural life. In the first place: gratitude. Recall the first words of Jesus in the Gospel we hear today: “‘Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to you I offer praise.’” Did he not intend those same words for us today, for we who live at the closing of the twentieth century, for us who have the means available to feed the hun-gry of the world? Let us respond generously to his command by sharing the fruit of our labor, by contributing to others the knowledge we have gained, by being the promoters of rural development everywhere and by defending the right to work of the rural population, since every person has a right to useful employment.

It is the third place, I want to speak about generosity, a generosity which arises from the fact that “God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity” (Gaudium et Spes, 69). You who are farmers today are stewards of a gift from God which was intended for the good of all humanity. You have the potential to provide food for the millions who have nothing to eat and thus to help rid the world of famine. To you I direct the same ques-tion asked by Paul VI five years ago: “... if the potential of nature is im-mense, if that of the mastery of the human genius over the universe seems almost unlimited, what is it that is too often missing... except that generosity, that anxiety which is stimulated by the sight of the suf-ferings and the miseries of the poor, that deep conviction that the whole family suffers when one of its members is in distress?” (Address to the World Food Conference, November 9, 1974, no. 9.)

Recall the time when Jesus saw the hungry crowd gathered on the hillside. What was his response? He did not content himself with expressing his compassion. He gave his disciples the command: “Give them something to eat yourselves” (Matthew 14:16). Did he not intend those same words for us today, for we who live at the closing of the twentieth century, for us who have the means available to feed the hun-gry of the world? Let us respond generously to his command by sharing the fruit of our labor, by contributing to others the knowledge we have gained, by being the promoters of rural development everywhere and by defending the right to work of the rural population, since every person has a right to useful employment.

Farmers everywhere provide bread for all humanity, but it is Christ alone who is the bread of life. He alone satisfies the deepest hunger of humanity. As Saint Augustine said: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you” (Confessions 1,1). While we are mindful of the physical hunger of millions of people, brothers and sisters on all continents, at this Eucharist we are reminded that the deepest hunger lies in the human soul. To all who acknowledge this hunger within them Jesus says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you.” This is the command of brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us listen to these words with all our heart. They are directed to every one of us. To all who till the soil, to all who benefit from the fruit of their labors, to every man and woman on earth, Jesus says: “Come to me...and I will refresh you.” Even if all the physical hunger of the world were sat-isfied, even if everyone who is hungry were fed by his or her own labor or by the generosity of others, the deepest hunger of man would still exist.

We are reminded in the letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians: “All that matters is that one is created anew.” Only Christ can create one anew; and this new creation finds its beginning only in his Cross and Resurrection. In Christ alone all creation is sanctified, lifted up and ful-filled. Therefore, I say: Come, all of you, to Christ. He is the bread of life. Come to Christ and you will never be hungry again.

B ring with you to Christ the products of your hands, the fruit of the land, that “which earth has given and human hands have made.” At this altar these gifts will be transformed into the Eucharist of the Lord.

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T he prepared text of Pope John Paul II’s homily delivered at Living History Farms, October 4, 1979.