

Reflection
Hunger Luncheon
World Food Prize
October 13, 2009

Thirty years ago October 4, 1979, Pope John Paul II visited Des Moines and Iowa. The largest crowd ever assembled in Iowa history, in one place, some 350,000 strong, came to see the Pope and hear his message.

The message the Pope communicated on that day in America's agricultural capitol has a timeless quality and relevance. John Paul said:

“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 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 toil of the people to whom God would entrust it. Thus the food which would sustain life on earth is willed by God to be both that “which earth has given and human hands have made.”

The Pope thus highlighted two central components of agriculture – one, land as a gift and secondly, our responsibility in producing its fruits to be accomplished through human genius and skillfulness.

To us Iowans he exhorted:

“You who live in the heartland of America have been entrusted with some of the earth’s best land: the soil is so rich in minerals, the climate so favorable for producing bountiful crops, with fresh air and unpolluted air available all around you. You are stewards of some of the most important resources God has given to the world. Therefore conserve the land well, so that your children’s children and generations after them will inherit an even richer land than was entrusted to you.”

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican’s permanent observer to the United Nations succinctly captured the Pope’s idea when he recently noted: “Our true human wealth is not oil but soil.”

Secondly in quoting his predecessor, Pope Paul the Sixth, in an Address to the World Food Conference on November 9, 1974, - Pope John Paul focused on man’s responsibility in producing the fruits of the earth . . .

“It is the dignity of those who work on the land and all of those engaged in different levels of research and action in the field of agricultural development which must be unceasingly proclaimed and promoted.”

And this is precisely what the World Food Prize achieves. From the Iowan Norman Borlaug to the Ethiopian Gabisa Ejeta unparalleled genius and skillfulness have been applied to the development of wheat and sorghum. Because of the work of these two men, millions upon millions of our brothers and sisters have been fed saving their very lives and enhancing their dignity.

The words of John Paul II spoken in Iowa induce hope and generate grounded optimism. Indeed it is possible to address and overcome the scourge of hunger. We express heartfelt gratitude to the Ruan family, and the leadership of Ambassador Ken Quinn in “proclaiming and promoting” the vision of Norman Borlaug embodied in the “World Food Prize” and in fulfilling Borlaug’s undying passion to feed the hungry of the world.

And so, I invite you to join me in prayer:

O God, today our hearts are filled with gratitude for the marvel of creation, particularly in the blessing of the hand. Give us, your children, the resolve to exercise great care in the production of its fruits all the while employing the genius and skillfulness with which we have been endowed in order that your will be fulfilled and that none of our brothers and sisters in the human family suffers from hunger.

Amen.

Bishop Richard Pates