

Labor Day 2019 Pastoral Aid

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 1, 2019

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment>

Reflection on the Sunday Readings

Introduction:

On this Sunday before Labor Day, we have an opportunity to reflect on what the Church teaches us about the dignity of work and the rights of workers. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, together with Catholic Relief Services, recently created this video to communicate the Church's teaching on work. [Note to homilist: If you have the technical capacity, you might consider showing as part of the homily the following video as an introduction to this principle of Catholic Social Teaching. The video and entire CST101 series are available at: WeAreSaltAndLight.org/cst101.]



In the Catholic tradition, work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continued participation in God's creative action. As we mark Labor Day this year, we are invited in a special way to reflect on the persistence of low wages and inequality in our workplaces. In your own experience of work—in an office setting, serving others, as a student, or working in the home—how have you experienced work as a form of participation in God's creative

action? How are persistent low wages a barrier to full participation in that creative action?
What can you do to support workplaces built upon justice and dignity?

Reflection:

- In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds us that it is in our service to those among us who are poor and vulnerable that we will be made righteous (LK 14:12-14). Low wage jobs contribute to a high poverty rate in many of our communities. As we approach Labor Day, we reflect on our call to live and act in solidarity with many in our workforce who struggle to make ends meet.
- Catholic teaching tells us that not only are workers due a "just wage" with which they can provide for their families' needs; they also deserve opportunities for rest and dignity-affirming benefits such as quality health care and paid time off. In addition, work should be something that enhances one's human dignity (see [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*](#), nos. 284, 287, 301, 302). This is a major focus in this year's Labor Day statement from the USCCB Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. [Read the brief statement](#) and encourage your parishioners to do the same, or better yet, distribute it at your parish!
- The experience of many workers in low wage jobs tells us that we must give serious consideration to how we can address areas of inequality in our economic systems. We are called to prioritize the well-being of the human person over the capital they produce (see St. John Paul II in [*Laborem Exercens*](#), no. 12, on "The Priority of Labor"). In our country today, corporate consolidation of wealth and power in monopoly organizations has led to lower wages for workers. Lower wages means many workers cannot sufficiently provide for their families or fully participate in the economy and society (see St. John Paul II in [*Centessimus Annus*](#), no. 48).
- This year marks the 100th anniversary of the "Bishops' Program for Social Reconstruction," a document released in 1919 that provided several recommendations for rebuilding America's politics, society, and economic system. In this document the Bishops concluded that "the full possibilities of increased production will not be realized so long as the majority of workers remain mere wage earners." How can we empower workers whose dignity and rights are not fully recognized? One way to do this is by supporting those organizations and business that promote employee ownership. The [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) funds several cooperatives and other employee owned projects that help low-wage workers to achieve fair wages, stable employment, job training opportunities, and better benefits.
- Catholic teaching holds that central to promoting the dignity of work and rights of workers is building solidarity with and among workers. The Church has long looked towards the important role played by labor unions in the effort to protect the needs and rights of workers in situations of inequality and injustice (see [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*](#), no. 305). As we seek to build greater solidarity with those workers in our community fighting for their rights, how can you show greater support of and involvement with the work of these labor unions?

- Where in your local community or around the world do you see the dignity of work or the rights of workers eroded? *[Note to homilist: If possible, try to offer at least one recent example of what you have seen in the news or in your own community. Possible examples might include sub-family wages for low-skill work; failure to provide maternity or family leave or other benefits; the wage gap that especially affects minorities and women; bad work conditions or withholding of wages from migrant workers; irresponsible corporate practices leading to environmental contamination, etc.]*

How Can Catholics Respond?

- In the workplace, if we are business owners, managers, or supervisors, we can help ensure that our businesses and organizations are offering family wages and the dignity-affirming benefits that our long Catholic tradition affirms should be available for all workers and their families.
- As we listen to the needs of those in our community, we are challenged to support those organizations that are empowering their employees to be owners and decision makers. [Find a local CCHD funded group](#) that supports employee ownership in your community and get involved in creating a more just economic system.
- We can use our purchasing power to help protect human dignity. We can be educated consumers, support local businesses and ethically-produced products, and let companies know when we are unhappy with their labor practices. Catholic Relief Services has a [CRS Ethical Trade](#) website where you can purchase goods from companies that value fair prices, safer working conditions, and environmentally sustainable practices at home and around the world.
- We can also join local efforts to support a just wage/family wage, which is a wage at which workers and their families can have access to what they need to fulfill basic needs and thrive.
- *Note for homilists: Be sure to highlight any efforts in your own parish or local community to assist workers and their families, or to support their needs through advocacy or other efforts. Be sure to tell people how to get involved.*

Bulletin announcement

Consider including in the bulletin one or both of the following messages:

In the Catholic tradition, work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. This Labor Day, reflect on the dignity of work and rights of workers by visiting www.usccb.org/jphd to read the annual Labor Day statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This Labor Day, take action to address inequality and injustice in our workplaces. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) (www.usccb.org/cchd) supports organizations that empower workers and address the root causes of poverty. Find a local CCHD-funded group and learn how you can get involved.

Prayer for the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Consider also including in the bulletin the following prayer.

Lord God, Master of the Vineyard,

How wonderful that you have invited us
who labor by the sweat of our brow
to be workers in the vineyard
and assist your work
to shape the world around us.

As we seek to respond to this call,
make us attentive to those who seek work
but cannot find it.

Help us listen to the struggles of those
who work hard to provide for their families
but still have trouble making ends meet.

Open our eyes to the struggles of those exploited
and help us speak for just wages and safe conditions,
the freedom to organize, and time for renewal.
For work was made for humankind
and not humankind for work.
Let it not be a vehicle for exploitation
but a radiant expression of our human dignity.

Give all who labor listening hearts
that we may pause from our work
to receive your gift of rest.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit
that you might work through us to let your justice reign.

Amen.

Parish Activity Suggestions

- **Host an adult formation session on the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.** Show the [CST101 video on that theme](#) and use [this discussion guide](#) from the bishops' WeAreSaltAndLight.org/cst101 page.
- **Host a Labor Day Picnic/Potluck.** Use one the Prayer for Workers above and focus the picnic on celebrating the dignity of work and the rights of workers.
- **Share the above bulletin announcement and prayer(s)** on the Sunday before Labor Day. Invite a parishioner to write a reflection—for example, a supervisor or manager about how he or she tries to practice respect for the dignity of work and workers in the workplace; a parishioner who has newly entered or re-entered the workforce after a period of unemployment; or someone who takes great pride in his or her work.
- **Share one or more of the following as a study sheet or bulletin insert.**
 - [Primer on Labor in Catholic Social Thought](#)
 - [Background on Protecting Workers and Promoting the Dignity of Work](#)
 - [Background on Just Wage and the Federal Minimum Wage](#)
 - [Background on Worsening Economic Inequality](#)
 - [Background on Protecting the Rights of Workers in a Globalized Economy](#)
 - [Background on Paid Sick Leave](#)

Examination of Conscience for Workers

Below is an Examination of Conscience for Workers. See also the [Vocation of a Business Leader's Examination of Conscience](#).

- Do I see my work as a gift from God? How is this reflected in my attitude at work?
- Do I see my work as a vocation?
- Do I promote a culture of life through my work?
- Do I live a divided life, where I separate the Gospel principles from my work?
- Do I receive the sacraments regularly and with attention to how they support and inform my work practices?
- Am I sharing my spiritual life/understanding of work with others in my work life?
- Am I taking seriously the dignity of the person in my work, as an employee? Am I being just in my attentiveness to my personal performance? Am I promoting integral human development (which promotes "the good of every person and of the whole person" [*Populorum Progressio*, 14] while ensuring that the company I work for is efficient?

Prayers of the Faithful

Possible Responses:

- Lord, hear our prayer.
- In your mercy, hear us Lord.
- In your compassion, answer us God.

Possible Prayers:

We pray for a renewal of spirit for the men and women who must work in jobs that ignore the dignity of their personhood. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the men and women who are not able to find jobs. We pray for their continued perseverance and determination as they continue to seek ways in which to participate in God's creative work. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the men and women who own companies, who lead companies, and who make decisions regarding safe work conditions and adequate wages. We pray that these leaders will act in the best interests of their laborers. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for union leaders, national and local, who are responsible for speaking for workers. May they be guided by the grace and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to be servant leaders. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for men, women, and children who experience a lack of solidarity and support in their daily struggle to survive. May we be aware of our responsibility to listen to the needs of our brothers and sisters in the world. We pray to the Lord.

We pray that as we are reminded that it is right and just to receive a fair wage for work, we may strive to promote dignity and respect for all in the workplace. We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have lost their lives while working, that they might be welcomed into the heavenly kingdom; and for their families, that they might be comforted and find security. We pray to the Lord.