

2016 Labor Day Statement Pastoral Aid

Readings of the Day, Sunday, September 4, 2016¹

The readings of the day all fit into the category of encouraging us to deal with human failings and struggles. We are reminded in all our readings today that relief from trials and burdens are found in the wisdom of God and by pursuing right relationship with all people in our lives.

Our first reading from the book of Wisdom speaks to the hesitations we, as children of God, may face in our lives. Sometimes we hesitate making decisions. Sometimes we struggle making plans. We all have many struggles that we face in our daily tasks. Whatever our age, we all come face-to-face with challenging times and decisions to make in our lives. We might struggle with a test we have to take in school. We might have a difficult project deadline. We may be struggling to figure out how much over-time to work to make the money stretch to the end of the month. These are all trying moments in the lives of God's people.

Where we can find solace is by reading the Word, taking comfort in wisdom, and finding support in God's protection. Praying to God will not remove these challenges, or present us with a serum that will cure all that causes us emotional, spiritual, and physical pain. Rather, this reading from the book of Wisdom reminds us that we cannot seek wisdom without God. Our prayer to God is a reminder that we are not alone.

The psalm we pray today is a lament. This is a direct cry to God. The lament of the community reminds us that our refuge is sought in the protection of a loving and protecting God. It is God who will protect the community from the wickedness that oppresses us. There are expressions of trust that the psalmist, on behalf of the community issues to God. Only solace is found with God. Our days on earth may be short, but it is knowing that God acts as our refuge and we obtain our wisdom from God's grace to face the challenges of our day.

The second reading from St. Paul's letter to Philemon is a familiar reminder from the epistle writer. St. Paul sets out to right a wrong- but this time with a direct letter to a person (Philemon), rather than a community (though the letter would have been read to the Christian community gathered with Philemon). St. Paul sets out to gently remind Philemon that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and we should receive one another as such. He is making an appeal to the good will and nature of Philemon. The good will is based on the fact that Philemon's slave, a man name Onesimus has run away and found St. Paul, whom is now regarded like a son. In a turn of phrase, St. Paul uses Onesimus' name, which means "profitable one" to remind Philemon that by sending Onesimus back to him, Philemon has the opportunity to act as a Christian which will be profitable. He will be doing God's will by releasing Onesimus from slavery. Our right relationship with God is not measured by money, but is rather measured by how we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ.

¹ The Collegeville Bible Commentary, 1992. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.
The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 1968. Prentice- Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Finally, our Gospel reading is from St. Luke. St. Luke goes to great pains to remind us that the call to faithful discipleship is an all-consuming vocation. We approach our call from Christ with discernment, knowing that the road to authentic discipleship is founded in our relationships with each other and our community. We cannot hold back when we are disciples of Christ. When Jesus states, "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother..." we receive a signal of the high cost of discipleship. It is meant to warn followers of Christ that the demands of Christ are hard, there are tough discussions we must all have with the people we love, yet that is what it means to be a follower of Christ. We must love each other enough to be forthcoming and honest.

Points for Theological Reflection from the Statement:

- Labor should allow the worker to develop and flourish as a person.
- A combination of economic and cultural conditions have led to difficulty getting decent jobs, poverty and unemployment, elevated rates of substance abuse, and major stresses on families.
- We see fear, anxiety, and division as the response of many politicians, but division is not the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Human labor, at its best, is a deeply holy thing that ought to honor our dignity as we help God "maintain the fabric of the world" (LS, no, 124).
- The dignity of workers, stability of families, and health of communities are intertwined.
- The Church's principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are helpful ways to frame our response as individuals and communities.
- Individual reflection and action is critical.
- Our faith calls us to love another- we are to share our vision of charity and justice with others and to live it concretely.
- Sufficient decent work honors dignity and families and is a necessary task for disciples.

Parish Activity Suggestions:

- Have the Parish host a Labor Day Picnic/Potluck
 - Have the opening prayer of the picnic be a prayer celebrating the dignity of work and those who are under appreciated in their work.
- Have the Parish host a Panel Discussion about the Dignity of Work- what this means, why dignity in our work is an important topic to the parish and the universal Church. Invite three young adults (18-40 years old) to be on the panel to speak about raising a family, living as a single person, what underemployment means, how unemployment affects their ability to live and work for the common good and to give personal testimony about their experience.

- The purpose of the Panel discussion is to allow people to share their personal stories about how their work informs the ability to live into the dignity of their work and they possess God’s care and love.
 - [“Primer on Labor and Catholic social teaching”](#)
 - [“Primer on Poverty and the Common Good”](#).
 - [Catholic Social Teaching](#).

Examination of Conscience for Workers:

As in year’s past, we featured the [Vocation of a Business Leader’s Examination of Conscience](#). In addition, we feature an Examination of Conscience for Workers.

- Do I see my work as gift from God? How is this reflected in my attitude at my work?
- Do I see my work as 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 seek 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 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 renewal of spirit for the men, women and children 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 creation and 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 suffer from our lack of solidarity in their daily struggle to survive. May we be aware of our responsibility to be in relationship with 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.

Scripture References on Labor for consideration:

- Genesis 2: 2-3
- Exodus 20: 9-10 & 15; 23: 12; 34: 21
- Leviticus 23: 3
- Numbers 8: 25-26
- Deuteronomy 5: 13-14; 24: 1-15
- 1 Chronicles 28: 20
- Psalm 28:4; 82: 3-4; 90: 17; 94: 16
- Proverbs 22: 22-23
- Sirach 38:8
- Jeremiah 17: 22; 22: 13
- Isaiah 58: 10, 12
- Nehemiah 5: 9-11
- Matthew 20; 22: 36-40
- James 2: 14-17

Quotes from Church Documents for Consideration:

“No consideration of the problems associated with development could fail to highlight the direct link between poverty and unemployment. In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or ‘because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it,

especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family”

Charity in Truth, § 63.

“Work must be an escape from poverty, not another version of it.”

A Place at the Table, §17.

“Catholic social teaching supports the rights of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal...workers, owners, employers and unions should work together to create decent jobs, build a more just economy, and advance the common good.”

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, §76

“Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all.”

The Joy of the Gospel, §203.

“The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies.”

The Joy of the Gospel, §203.

“Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘disposable’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised—they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers’”.

The Joy of the Gospel, §53.

“If we reflect on the proper relationship between human beings and the world around us, we see the need for a correct understanding of work; if we talk about the relationship between human beings and things, the question arises as to the meaning and purpose of all human activity. This has to do not only with manual or agricultural labor but with any activity involving a modification of existing reality, from producing a social report to the design of a technological development. Underlying every form of work is a concept of the relationship which we can and must have with what is other than ourselves.”

Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home, §125.

“We need to remember that men and women have ‘the capacity to improve their lot, to further their moral growth and to develop their spiritual endowments.’ Work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God.”

Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home, §127.

“We were created with a vocation to work. The goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work. Yet the orientation of the economy has favored a kind of technological progress in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines. This is yet another way in which we can end up working against ourselves. The loss of jobs also has a negative impact on the economy ‘through the progressive erosion of social capital: the network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence.’ In other words, ‘human cost always include economic costs, and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs.’ To stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad for business for society.”
Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home, § 128.

“We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity. Rather, it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism: it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else.”
Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home, §237.