

# Labor Day 2018 Pastoral Aid

## Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

### September 2, 2018

<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](http://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. 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? When has it felt difficult to recognize the dignity of work?

We can turn to the Sunday readings to help us in our reflection on work.

**First Reading (Dt. 4:1-2, 6-8):**

- In the first reading, from the book of Deuteronomy, we hear this question: “What great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?”
- For the ancient Israelites, God's gift of the law was a sign of his great fidelity, love, and care for the people. Their keeping of this law was a sign of their love and fidelity to God.
- What did the law entail? And why was God’s law called “just”? We might be most familiar with the ten commandments (5:6-21), but the book of Deuteronomy is filled with many other details about the commands that the Israelites were to follow. Work and economic justice are topics that appear throughout the book of Deuteronomy. For example:
  - In Chapter 5 (v. 13-15), God’s law specifies that the Sabbath, including rest from work, is for everyone, regardless of class or status.
  - Chapter 14 (v. 28-29), includes instruction to save a portion, or tithe, of the produce to share with “the resident alien, the orphan and the widow within your gates.”
  - Chapter 24 (v. 14-15) warns against exploiting those who are poor or foreign workers and to pay wages promptly—“since the servant is poor and is counting on them. Otherwise the servant will cry to the LORD against you, and you will be held guilty.”
  - Chapter 27 (v. 17-19) curses those who steal land from neighbors or who wrong those who are poor.

**Psalm (15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5)**

- The Psalmist likewise emphasizes the importance of just laws which respect dignity and treat others with fairness. In today’s response, we heard: “The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.”
- We also hear in the Psalm: The one who is just “does no harm” (v. 3), keeps promises to others, and “lends no money at interest, accepts no bribe against the innocent” (v. 5).

**Second Reading (Jas. 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27) and Gospel (Mk. 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23)**

- In the letter of James, we hear “Be doers of the word and not hearers only” (v. 22).
- Mark’s Gospel emphasizes the challenges of being doers, including our inclinations toward greed, deceit, theft, and other evils, which defile us and harm our relationship with God and neighbor (Mk. 7: 20-22).
- As a society, these same evils – existing in our hearts and in the structures that we create and perpetuate – can deny the dignity of work and the rights of workers.
- For example, Pope Francis writes about greed and the idolatry of money, which can lead to our failure to prioritize the well-being of God’s creation, including our human family:
  - “So often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations” (Message for World Day of Peace 2014).

- In a reflection on the biblical story of queen Jezebel, who has Naboth killed in order to acquire his vineyard (1 Kings 21), Pope Francis writes, “This is not a story of former times, it is also a story of today, of the powerful who, in order to have more money, exploit the poor, exploit people. It is the story of the trafficking of people, of slave labor, of poor people who work ‘under the table’ and for a minimal wage, thus enriching the powerful. It is the story of corrupt politicians who want more and more! This is why I said that it would be good for us to read St Ambrose’s book about Naboth, because this text is relevant to modern day. . . . That is where the exercise of authority without respect for life, without justice, without mercy leads” ([General Audience](#), 2/24/16).

### Application

- 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.*]
- Catholic teaching calls us to be concerned when unemployed persons seek work but cannot find it (see Pope Francis, [Evangelii Gaudium](#), no. 204), or when people are forced to accept work that pays too little to support a family (see St. John Paul II in [Laborem Exercens](#), no. 18, on a “family wage”), or when employment fails to offer those life and dignity-affirming benefits that our long Catholic tradition affirms must be available for every worker and their families in the areas of sick leave, maternity leave, time for rest, and quality health insurance (see [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), no. 301). We are also called to be concerned when the goods we buy and the products we use every day were produced by people—sometimes even children—working under terrible conditions in poor countries (see Pope Francis, [Message to Workers’ Associations](#)).
- As we reflect on the vision of Catholic teaching, and in the just laws of the book of Deuteronomy about the treatment of the poor and workers, or the Psalmist’s warning not to take economic advantage of others, or Mark’s warnings against greed, we might ask ourselves: How can we help make God’s vision of justice a reality? How can we, in our families, institutions, and as a society, better respect the dignity and rights of workers and the well-being of their families?

### Response

- 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 every worker and their families.
- 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. If we are responsible for purchasing goods in our workplaces, or even at home, we can try to purchase goods from companies with ethical 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 living 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.*
- These are challenging things to do! Sometimes following God's "just laws" can be difficult. But we pray that like the early Christian disciples to whom James wrote, we can "Be doers of the word and not hearers only" (James 1:22), so that we can put into practice the call to respect the dignity of work and the rights of workers.

## 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 by visiting [www.usccb.org/jphd](http://www.usccb.org/jphd) to read the annual Labor Day statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This Labor Day, use your power as a consumer to support companies that value fair prices, safe working conditions and environmentally sustainable practices at home and around the world. The Catholic Relief Services Ethical Trade website (<https://ethicaltrade.crs.org/>) connects consumers with products produced in ethical manners.

## Prayer for Work

*Consider also including in the bulletin the following prayer for work.*

Creator God,  
thank you for providing us  
with the gift to share our talents.  
Provide our community, our nation, our world  
the fortitude to provide work for all  
which is decent and fair.

Make us faithful stewards  
of your creation  
to enhance the human dignity  
of our global family.

We ask this in the name of Jesus,  
who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit  
now and forever.

Amen

(From *Being Neighbor: The Catechism and Social Justice*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, April 1998)

## 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](http://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 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.