

Pastoral Aid for the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Labor Day Weekend)
September 3, 2017

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

Reflection on the Sunday Readings

Introduction:

- Today's readings can help us reflect on God's vision for his people—a vision we are called to live out in our communities. This vision is one which prioritizes service over power, and which asks us to care for those who are poor and vulnerable in our communities.
- This is a perfect message for Labor Day weekend, a time when we reflect on the dignity of work and the Catholic call to place the human person at the center of economic life.

First Reading (Jer. 20:7-9):

- Jeremiah was a prophet in Judah in the years before the Babylonian exile. He repeatedly challenged the kings of Judah to repent of their unfaithfulness to God, railing against their worship of false idols, immoral living, and their treatment of those who are poor and oppressed.
- Poverty and inequality were among the sins of Jeremiah's time, as they still are in our own time. Part of Jeremiah's message (e.g. 5:20-21; 7:1-15; 21:12-14; 22:1-5) was to call leaders to address the inequality in their midst, since caring for the downtrodden, whom God loves, is a sign of our faithfulness and love for God.
- In today's reading, Jeremiah laments the difficulty of his task and begs God to set things right. He feels tempted to give up, but cannot: "it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it" (v. 9).

Psalm (63: 2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9)

- Like Jeremiah, the Psalmist expresses his trust in God and his vision for his people—especially when all seems "parched, lifeless and without water" (v. 2).
- Today, we might reflect on this question: for whom in our community does life feel parched or lifeless? How might persons who are unemployed, underpaid, or underemployed be especially vulnerable to this feeling? (People who are *underemployed* work at part-time or irregular jobs, or at jobs insufficient with respect to the person's training or economic needs.) *Note for homilists: Consider telling a story about how a person or family in your own parish community has been affected by such issues. Be sure to anonymize the story, or get permission before sharing it.*

Second Reading (Rom. 12:1-2)

- In the second reading, Paul urges the Christian community in Rome, “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (v. 2).
- Today we might ask ourselves what values of “this age” must be transformed to better reflect God’s will for our families and communities? Pope Francis asks us to reflect on “the economic system that has the god of money at its center,” which creates “structures that leave so many brothers and sisters by the wayside.”¹ This prioritization of money over people is not in keeping with God’s vision for the world.
- Today’s second reading from Paul is immediately followed in his letter to the Romans by more well-known passages that illustrate “what is the will of God” that we should strive towards: being one body in Christ (v. 3-8) that cares for each diverse member with mutual love (v. 9-21). This includes caring for those in need (v. 13).
- How is God’s vision for our communities calling us, as a society, to better respect the dignity and rights of workers and the well-being of their families?

Gospel (Mt. 16: 21-27)

- Today’s Gospel gives us one clue. Matthew illustrates Jesus’ priority for service to others and the dignity of the human person, over power. Jesus exhorts his followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. He asks, “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (v. 26)
- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 1021) cites this verse in particular in affirming how our works and love and faith affect the “final destiny of the soul.” Our love and respect for the dignity of others are a matter of salvation!
- For us, as Catholics, our priority in economic life must be to uplift the human person and serve the common good. These things are more important than gaining “the whole world.”
- Like Peter and the disciples in today’s Gospel, we must think as God thinks, not as human beings do. (v. 23)

Application:

- In our own families and communities, we have likely experienced the effects of prioritizing the “god of money.” We see this 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”). We also see this 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*

¹ Pope Francis, [Message to World Meeting of Popular Movements in Modesto](#), Feb. 10, 2017

[Church](#), no. 301). We also know that many of 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' Association](#)).

- *Note for homilists: This is another great opportunity to insert a real story relevant to your community, on one of the topics mentioned in the previous bullet point.*
- Pope Francis writes, "The grave danger is to disown our neighbors."² We do this when we believe that we are not responsible for being part of the problem or the solution. Instead, we can recognize that we are all connected, and all responsible for one another. We are all part of one body in Christ.
- We are all called to recognize our role as Christian consumers. When we purchase goods, are we more motivated by preserving our pocket change, or protecting the dignity of the people laboring to make, or sell, the products we use? We can use our purchasing power to help protect human dignity. We can be educated consumers, support local businesses and fair trade 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 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.
- Business owners, managers, and supervisors can look at workplace policies and decisions to ensure that the dignity of the human person is prioritized over profit.
- *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! It is hard to deny ourselves (and the "god of money") and to take up the cross. But we pray that like Jeremiah and the early Christian community in Rome, we will feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to make God's vision a reality, so that we can care for all of the members of our "body," both locally and globally.

Quotes

"The rights of workers, like all other rights, are based on the nature of the human person and on his transcendent dignity. The Church's social Magisterium has seen fit to list some of these rights, in the hope that they will be recognized in juridical systems: the right to a just wage; the right to rest; the right 'to a working environment and to manufacturing processes which are not harmful to the workers' physical health or to their moral integrity'; the right that one's personality in the workplace should be safeguarded 'without suffering any affront to one's conscience or personal dignity'; the right to appropriate subsidies that are necessary for the subsistence of unemployed

² Pope Francis, [Message to World Meeting of Popular Movements in Modesto](#), Feb. 10, 2017

workers and their families; the right to a pension and to insurance for old age, sickness, and in case of work-related accidents; the right to social security connected with maternity; the right to assemble and form associations." ([Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), no. 301)

"For some time, the crisis of the prevailing paradigm has confronted us. I am speaking of a system that causes enormous suffering to the human family, simultaneously assaulting people's dignity and our Common Home in order to sustain the invisible tyranny of money that only guarantees the privileges of a few." (Pope Francis, [Message to World Meeting of Popular Movements in Modesto](#), Feb. 10, 2017)

"Today work is at risk. It is a world where work is not considered with the dignity it has and gives." (Pope Francis, [Meeting with the World of Work at the Ilva Factory, Genoa](#), May 27, 2017)

"The world of work is a human priority. It is, therefore, a Christian priority, our priority, and also a priority of the Pope. Because it comes from that first command that God gave to Adam: "Go, till the earth, work the earth, tame it". There has always been friendship between the Church and work, starting with a working Jesus. Where there is a worker, there is the interest and the gaze of love of the Lord and of the Church." (Pope Francis, [Meeting with the World of Work at the Ilva Factory, Genoa](#), May 27, 2017)

"Lack of work is far more than not having a source of income for to live on. Work is also this, but it is much, much more. By working we become a fuller person, our humanity flourishes, young people become adults only by working. The Church's social doctrine has always seen human work as a participation in creation that continues every day, also thanks to the hands, mind and heart of the workers. On Earth there are a few joys greater than those we experience working, just as there are fewer pains greater than those of work, when work exploits, crushes, humiliates, kills." (Pope Francis, [Meeting with the World of Work at the Ilva Factory, Genoa](#), May 27, 2017)

Bulletin announcement

As followers of Jesus, we judge economic choices and institutions by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the common good. This Labor Day, reflect on dignity of work by visiting www.usccb.org/jphd to read the annual Labor Day statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Parish Activity Suggestions

- **Host a Labor Day Picnic/Potluck.** Have the opening prayer of the picnic celebrate the dignity of work and those who are underappreciated in their work.
- **Host a panel discussion about the dignity of work.** Invite three parishioners to serve on the panel. Ideas you might consider include: young adult parents with a family; a

person who works with or is part of an immigrant community vulnerable to wage theft or other worker abuse; a person nearing retirement age; an employer or manager on corporate responsibility and the common good; and/or a person who has experienced unemployment or underemployment. The idea is for the panelists to reflect on how issues related to work affect persons' and families' ability to live healthy lives, and to give personal testimony about their experience.

- **Share one or more of the following at the above events, or as bulletin inserts.**
 - [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](#)
 - [Primer on Poverty, an Option for the Poor, and the Common Good](#)
 - [Selected Quotes of Pope Francis by Subject](#)

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 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.