

DIGNITY OF HUMAN WORK



✚ A bit of history:

International Workers' Day is celebrated every May 1 to commemorate the "Haymarket Martyrs" a group of anarchist trade unionists who were executed in 1886 in the United States for claiming their labor rights.

The workers demanded an 8-hour work day, since they used to work from 12 to 16 hours a day. Under this pressure, Andrew Johnson, the President of the United States, signed a law that established the 8-hour work day. However, the business sector decided not to comply, so workers in the city of Chicago began a strike on May 1. A movement led by Albert Pearson brought together more than 80 thousand workers. It was described as "outrageous and disrespectful". Pearson's critics said that his request was "the same as asking to be paid a salary without fulfilling any work". The strike spread to other cities, and ended up including more than 400,000 workers in 5,000 simultaneous strikes. Both the government and the business sector believed that they were facing the beginning of an anarchist revolution. The McCormik factory in Chicago did not recognize the victory of the workers, and on May 1 the police fired on the demonstrators at the doors of the company. In the days that followed, more workers died until the fourth day a bomb thrown at the police exploded, in an event known as "the Haymarket affair". On June 21, the trial of 31 workers accused of having been the alleged promoters of the conflict began. Two of them were sentenced to life imprisonment, one to 15 years of forced labor and five to

death by hanging. These 8 people became the “Martyrs of Chicago,” and in their commemoration it was declared that May Day would be International Worker's Day.

The conflict between two ways of thinking about people, society, work and the economy begins. And the Church through the papal encyclicals makes her voice heard, safeguarding the value of human work and its praiseworthy contribution to the economy together with capital.

In spite of so many efforts, teachings, and encyclicals of the Church on the dignity of work, the rights and obligations of the worker, the work and the worker do not enjoy adequate recognition, even today.

In society today, the balance sheets and profits of companies are more prominent than the dignity of work. Pope Francis reflected on this during a holy mass that he celebrated in the chapel of the House of Santa Marta. On the day that the Church celebrates Saint Joseph the Worker, the Pontiff said that the commemoration of this dimension of the adoptive father of Christ refers to "God the worker" and "Jesus the worker" who worked in Saint Joseph's workshop, but also "until the Cross". "Those who work are worthy, have a special dignity, a dignity of person": the Pope insisted.

The dignity of human work lies in the fact that it is performed by a person, who is called to perform in and through God. In addition to being the legitimate means of maintaining one's family, work is also the means of one's integral development as a person. One cannot understand the concept of work without also understanding the nature of the person. People are not things that can simply be used and thrown away.

A rereading of the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* on human work, especially of its theological and spiritual section, is always fascinating. Overcoming a false vision, which identified work as a punishment for sin, Pope St. John Paul II knew to point out the original goodness of work as a constituent element of the creation of human beings. Despite the fatigue that comes from current models of work, "work is a human good... And it is not only a 'useful' good or a good 'to enjoy', but a 'worthy' good that corresponds to the dignity of the person, a good that expresses this dignity and increases it". And this is true " because through work a person not only transforms nature, adapting it to one's own needs, but that person also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being" (*Laborem Exercens* no. 9).

In the light of this reflection, we invite you to look at work, not under the conflicting social perspective, but as a human and Christian virtue.

Work is, above all, a great means of personal improvement, and a means to develop and nurture one's talents and abilities.

Work helps people live with dignity, because what is eaten is not the result of the work of others, or of robbery - but of a noble and generous effort.

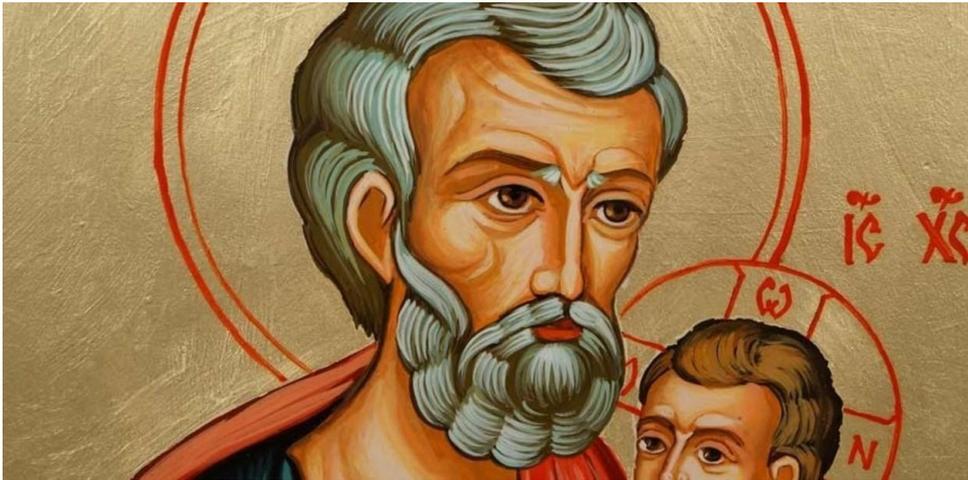
Work dignifies the person, ennobles and sanctifies them.

The one who works lends his or her hands to God to continue with God's creative work.

God created a beautiful world, and left it to us, so that we, with our ingenuity and our effort, might be the ones to give the world the last touches, so that we might prepare for God the final restoration, which will be the work of God.

For deeper reflection:

- What is my experience of work?
- Can I say that work dignifies me as a person? Does it help me to develop my talents and abilities?
- With my work do I grow and help others to grow? Do I feel that with my work I contribute to the transformation of the world towards one that is more fair and inclusive?
- How can I contribute so that in our society we value and recognize that work dignifies the person, and that we are co-creators with God in the construction of the world?



Joseph of Nazareth, carpenter and husband of the Virgin Mary, is the patron of workers and has been celebrated since May 1, 1955, when his feast day was instituted by Pope Pius XII before a group of workers gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican.

Prayer:

We turn to you, O blessed Saint Joseph, our protector on earth, as one who knows the value of work and the answer to our call. Through your Holy Wife, the Virgin Mother of God, and knowing the paternal love you had for our Lord Jesus, we ask you to assist us in our needs and strengthen our work.

By the promise to perform our daily tasks with dignity, free us from falling into the sin of greed and a corrupt heart. Be the attentive guardian of our work, our defender and strength against injustice and error. We ask you especially for those who have lost their source of work, so they will soon find another opportunity.

We follow your example and seek your help. Help us in all our efforts, so that we may obtain eternal rest in Heaven with you. Amen.

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