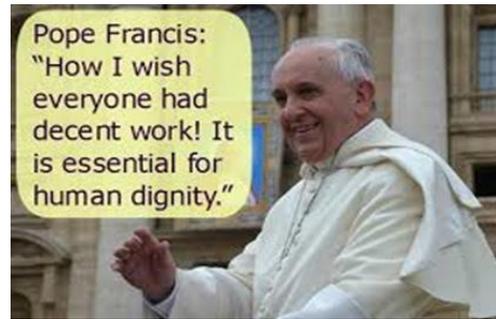


## Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers



Work honors the gifts and talents that God has given to each one of us.



Labour Day is an annual holiday to celebrate the achievements of workers. It has its origins in the labour union movement, specifically the eight-hour day movement, which advocated eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for rest. For many countries, Labour Day is synonymous with, or linked with International Workers' Day, which occurs on 1 May. For other countries, Labour Day is celebrated on a different date, often one with special significance for the labour movement in that country.

In 1955, the Catholic Church dedicated 1 May to "Saint Joseph the Worker". Saint Joseph is the patron saint of workers and craftsmen.



Catholic Social Teaching holds that work is dignified and an intrinsic good, and workers must always be valued and respected.

Jesus became "like us in all things, devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter's bench" (*John Paul II – Laborem Exercens, On Human Work*)

[The state] "has also the duty to protect the rights of all its people, and particularly of its weaker members, the workers, women and children. It can never be right for the State to shirk its obligation of working actively for the betterment of the condition of the workingman." (*John XXIII – Mater et Magistra*)

Work is *an obligation*, a human *duty*. We must work, because God commanded it and because our own humanity requires work to be maintained and developed. We work out of regard for others, especially our own family, for the society we belong to, the country of which we are a child, and the whole human family of which we are a member, since we are the heir to the work of generations and at the same time a sharer in building the future of those who will come after us in the succession of history. Through work we not only transform nature, adapting it to our own needs, but also achieve fulfilment as a human being (*On Human Work – Laborem Exercens*).

The economy of any country must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected--the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

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 – Caritas in Veritate*)

"The beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person." All people have the right to work, to a chance to develop their qualities and their personalities in the exercise of their professions, to equitable remuneration which will enable them and their families "to lead a worthy life on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level" and to assistance in case of need arising from sickness or age. (*A Call to Action – Octogesima Adversniens*)



### A Prayer for Workers

*O glorious Joseph! Who concealed your incomparable and regal dignity of custodian of Jesus and of the Virgin Mary under the humble appearance of a craftsman and provided for them with your work, protect with loving power your sons and daughters, especially those entrusted to you.*

*You know their anxieties and sufferings, because you yourself experienced them at the side of Jesus and of His Mother. Do not allow them, oppressed by so many worries, to forget the purpose for which they were created by God. Do not allow the seeds of distrust to take hold of their immortal souls. Remind all the workers that in the fields, in factories, in mines, offices and in scientific laboratories, they are not working, rejoicing, or suffering alone, but at their side is Jesus, with Mary, His Mother and ours, to sustain them, to dry the sweat of their brow, giving value to their toil. Teach them to turn work into a very high instrument of sanctification as you did. Amen.*

### Some Scripture References to Work

<b>Genesis 2:1-3</b>	God rests on the seventh day.
<b>Genesis 2:15</b>	God settles man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it.
<b>Deuteronomy 5:13-15</b>	The Sabbath is for everyone—all are allowed to rest from their work.
<b>Deuteronomy 14:28-29</b>	God blesses our work so that we may share its fruits with others.
<b>Deuteronomy 24:14-15</b>	Do not withhold wages from your workers, for their livelihood depends on them.
<b>Sirach 34:20-22</b>	To deprive an employee of wages is to commit murder.
<b>Isaiah 58:3-7</b>	To observe religious practices, but oppress your workers is false worship.
<b>Jeremiah 22:13</b>	Woe to him who treats his workers unjustly.
<b>Matthew 20:1-16</b>	All workers should be paid a just and living wage.
<b>Mark 2:27</b>	The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.
<b>Luke 3:10-14</b>	Practice integrity in your work.
<b>Luke 12:13-21</b>	One's worth is not determined by an abundance of possessions.
<b>James 5:1-6</b>	Those who become rich by abusing their workers have sinned against God.

Let us pray for an end to bonded labour and modern day slavery especially in India, Haiti and Pakistan and where migrant workers are exploited for their cheap labour.

Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers (Education for Justice)

<http://bit.do/DignityofWorkRightsofWorkers>

Prayer contributed by Sister Del Kang, Province of Singapore-Malaysia