

Homily on Labor Day

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Labor Day used to be a big holiday. Now it is a day used as a reference point to remind us that the summer season is coming to an end and that school is beginning; that life is returning to "*normal*". This is a tragic reality of our modern age because we no longer pause to reflect on the meaning and value of human work. We no longer perceive work as a participation in almighty God's act of creation.

We no longer perceive the working person, man or woman as being created in the image of God after God's own likeness. This misperception of humanity is extremely dangerous because it leads us to see the other person as an object to be used by us and then discarded when that person is no longer useful. This is not in keeping with our call to be apostles of Christ. Jesus Christ who took on our human flesh. Jesus was the Son of God and he was the Son of a young maiden from the backwater non-descript town of Nazareth and that he was born in a stable not a luxurious villa, from which He and his parents had to flee for their lives. They were human beings in need of asylum. We remember that Christ called common everyday folks to be his apostles. All of us gathered here have been called to be his apostles - those who proclaim the message of Christ.

That is why beginning with Pope Leo XIII in 1891 with his proclamation of *Rerum Novarum* at the height of the industrial revolution down to our present pontiff Benedict XVI who promulgated *Charity in Truth*, Our church has always stood with and for the working person. Our church has always upheld the inherent dignity of every person. This is what an apostle is called to do. This was true for Bishops [James Cardinal Gibbons](#) in Baltimore, MD and [John Ireland](#), in St. Paul, MN at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and for Bishop Mahoney and Cardinal McCarrick and Msgr. George Higgins and many other who as apostles of Christ have stood with migrants and workers in their present day struggle for dignity and respect.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has issued statements of strong support on behalf of the working person. These statements have reminded our elected officials that it is immoral to balance the federal budget on the backs of working person, those who are struggling to survive in this economy. Our bishops have reminded us that the deficit can be reduced only when everyone pays his/her fair share. If we are going to truly respect the working person, we need to end the special privileges (tax breaks) for the rich, the well to do and corporations that continue to rape and destroy the beauty of God's creation and treat their workers like disposable commodities. We also need to examine the amount of expenditures for defense.

An amount which is wasteful, obscene, and immoral.

As we gather this morning to celebrate Mass, we need to remember that we do so at a chapel dedicated to Saint Joseph, who has always been depicted in Christian art as a carpenter, a working person. We need to keep in the forefront of our consciousness the reality that Saint Joseph is the Universal Patron of Workers. The best way for us to give honor to Saint Joseph is for us to stand in solidarity with the working man/woman who are our brothers and sisters.

Quote by Cardinal Gibbons 1834-1921

It is the right of laboring classes to protect themselves and the duty of the whole people to find a remedy against avarice, oppression and corruption.