



THE DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF WORKERS



“ Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work.”

Pope Francis, *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*



The Church has long been a supporter of the right of people to work. The beginnings of much of modern Catholic social teaching came during the industrial revolution. Cardinal Manning of Westminster was influential in the writing of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891 which looked at the rights and treatment of workers, calling for more just pay and conditions.

Work is more than simply being able to earn money. It is about being able to support oneself, and one's family. It is about finding a role and place within society. It is linked to flourishing as a person, and finding fulfilment, a sense of purpose and worth.

Linked once more to the guideline of human dignity, we are reminded that people are not “things”, not some commodity which can be discarded when no longer seen as being of any use. People are not mere tools as part of a process towards an end point in whatever job they perform. Human beings are greater than any thing.

“ The goods of life – land, lodging and labor – should be made available to all. This is not altruism, or goodwill: it is what love demands.”

Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*

The work people do should be valued, because the person him/herself must be valued. As part of this, people deserve a fair, just wage for the work they do. They must also be provided with proper working conditions within which to carry out their role.

In the letter of St James, the owners of the fields are lambasted, for “the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you”. [James 5:4](#)

It is one of the reasons that the Church has been, and continues to be, so involved with the ‘Living Wage’ and ‘Fair Trade’ movements, both of which seek a just wage and adequate working conditions for the working people.

At the present time, we see in all our communities rising unemployment, particularly of the young, and also those nearing the age of retirement. People at the start of their careers unable to gain self worth by supporting themselves by means of a job. People who have worked throughout their lives now made to feel worthless because of their age.

“Work gives us a sense of shared responsibility for the development of the world, and ultimately, for our life as a people.”

Pope Francis, *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*

When we hear on TV about ‘people living on benefits’, what is our first reaction? Do we also condemn, or do we remember all those who desperately seek employment, but struggle? Do we think about the causes of their unemployment? Do we realise that within our own communities there are people struggling, who would gladly work if they could, but who feel their dignity ebb away because of the position they are in? Is our first reaction one which comes from love and the notion of Caritas?

- Within our communities, how might we support those seeking work?
- How might different generations work together to practise interview techniques, work on CVs together, or share IT expertise for online applications?
- Is our parish community paying its workers a living wage? Are those who volunteer within the parish treated fairly, even if not being paid? Have we worked towards Fairtrade Parish status?
- How can we better support refugees and asylum seekers within our parish and/or local community?



HYMNS

- Lord of all hopefulness – Jan Struther
- Bread for the world – Bernadette Farrell
- Blest are you, Lord, God of all creation
Ancieto Nazareth
- Come to me – John Bell/WGWW



Matthew 20:1-16

SCRIPTURE

Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?



SCRIPTURE

Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food.

Matthew 10:1-15



HOMILY NOTES

- The roots of modern CST go back to the industrial revolution, and Cardinal Manning of Westminster who was influenced by the dock workers in London. His sharing of the horrific conditions and treatment of the workers helped inspire Pope Leo XIII when he wrote the first real CST encyclical, or letter, from the Pope, Rerum Novarum in 1891.
- Work brings dignity, purpose and fulfillment to people.
- Work enables people to provide for themselves, their families.
- When sending out the disciples, Jesus tells them not to take lots of things or expect lots of things from others, "for labourers deserve their food".
- Today we know there is high youth unemployment, denying young people the chance to flourish, not allowing them to have true dignity. We also know many older people find themselves out of work and struggling to find work, again, their dignity harmed. What can our community do to support them? How can we help the young and those with experience to support one another?
- "There is no worse material poverty... than the poverty which prevents people from earning their bread and deprives them of the dignity of work."
 - (Pope Francis to a conference on unemployment, May 2013)
- When people are employed, they deserve a just wage, which is why the Church continues to support a living wage. In the letter of St James, the owners of the fields are lambasted, for "the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you". James 5.4.
- And the choices we make about what we buy also impacts on others – what are the conditions of those who grow the coffee beans we drink, or the cotton for the clothes we wear? How do our choices empower the human dignity of those who provide the food, drink, clothes, power we consume?
- How do our choices show our love in action?

Symbols to add to the focal point

- A statue or icon of St Joseph the Worker
- Some tools (symbol of St Joseph the Worker, often includes a carpenter's square measure)
- A laptop/briefcase/diary

PRAYER

- For the Church throughout the world; that inspired by St Joseph the Worker, its voice will be heard as it upholds the dignity of all people.
- For all people who hold public office; that they will act to ensure all people find dignified work, with a just wage, and proper working conditions.
- For those who are unemployed; that they will find strength to keep searching for employment through the support of those around them.
- For our local community; that we will be inspired to support in all ways that we can those who are unemployed.

