

April 2019

✦ Generations of Faith ✦

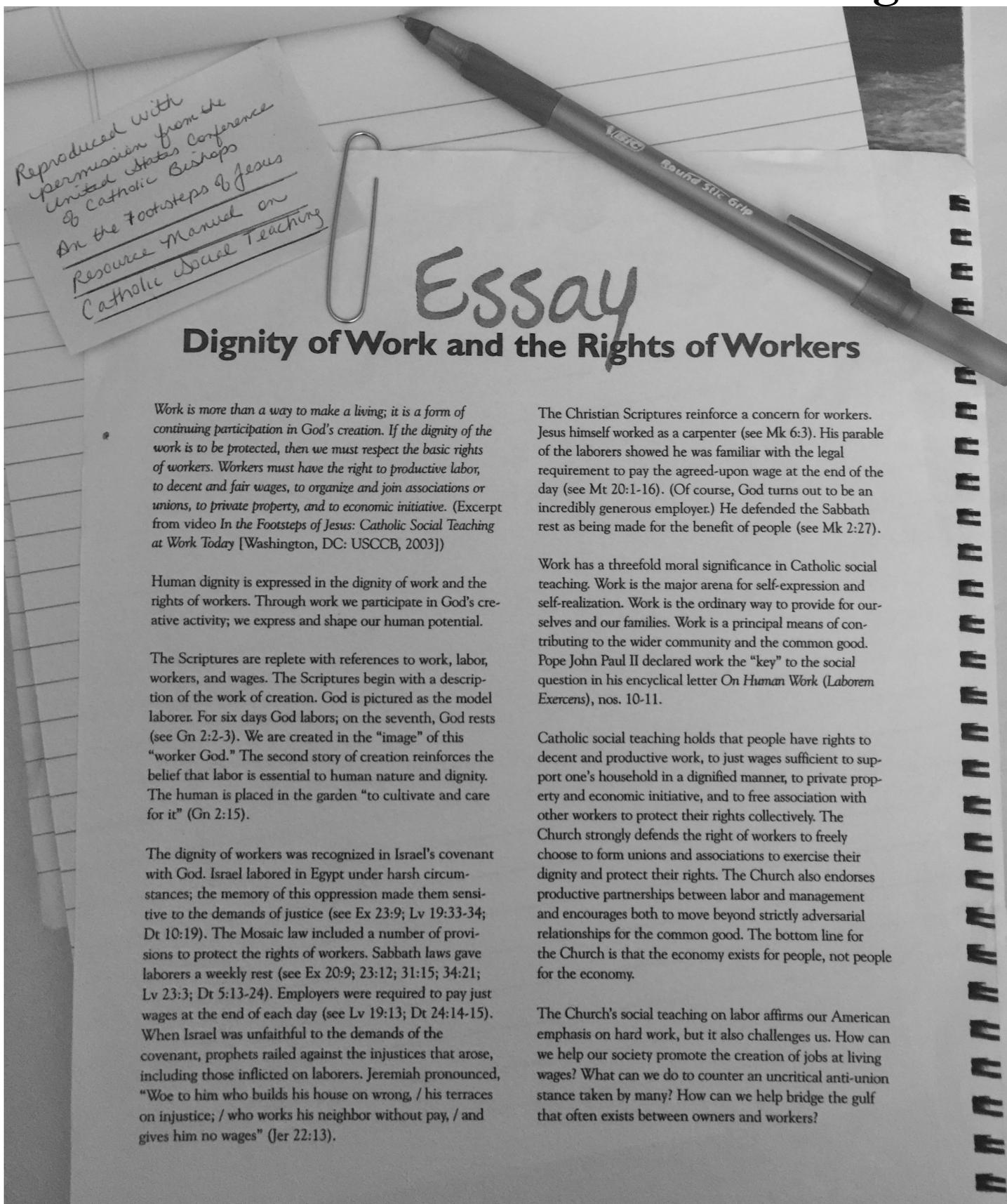
FAITH NOTES

✦ Enriching, Educating, Engaging All Ages ✦



“More than a way to make a living...”

Work and Catholic Social Teaching



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On the Footsteps of Jesus
Resource Manual on Catholic Social Teaching

Essay

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

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 the work is to be protected, then we must respect the basic rights of workers. Workers must have the right to productive labor, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join associations or unions, to private property, and to economic initiative. (Excerpt from video *In the Footsteps of Jesus: Catholic Social Teaching at Work Today* [Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003])

Human dignity is expressed in the dignity of work and the rights of workers. Through work we participate in God's creative activity; we express and shape our human potential.

The Scriptures are replete with references to work, labor, workers, and wages. The Scriptures begin with a description of the work of creation. God is pictured as the model laborer. For six days God labors; on the seventh, God rests (see Gn 2:2-3). We are created in the "image" of this "worker God." The second story of creation reinforces the belief that labor is essential to human nature and dignity. The human is placed in the garden "to cultivate and care for it" (Gn 2:15).

The dignity of workers was recognized in Israel's covenant with God. Israel labored in Egypt under harsh circumstances; the memory of this oppression made them sensitive to the demands of justice (see Ex 23:9; Lv 19:33-34; Dt 10:19). The Mosaic law included a number of provisions to protect the rights of workers. Sabbath laws gave laborers a weekly rest (see Ex 20:9; 23:12; 31:15; 34:21; Lv 23:3; Dt 5:13-24). Employers were required to pay just wages at the end of each day (see Lv 19:13; Dt 24:14-15). When Israel was unfaithful to the demands of the covenant, prophets railed against the injustices that arose, including those inflicted on laborers. Jeremiah pronounced, "Woe to him who builds his house on wrong, / his terraces on injustice; / who works his neighbor without pay, / and gives him no wages" (Jer 22:13).

The Christian Scriptures reinforce a concern for workers. Jesus himself worked as a carpenter (see Mk 6:3). His parable of the laborers showed he was familiar with the legal requirement to pay the agreed-upon wage at the end of the day (see Mt 20:1-16). (Of course, God turns out to be an incredibly generous employer.) He defended the Sabbath rest as being made for the benefit of people (see Mk 2:27).

Work has a threefold moral significance in Catholic social teaching. Work is the major arena for self-expression and self-realization. Work is the ordinary way to provide for ourselves and our families. Work is a principal means of contributing to the wider community and the common good. Pope John Paul II declared work the "key" to the social question in his encyclical letter *On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)*, nos. 10-11.

Catholic social teaching holds that people have rights to decent and productive work, to just wages sufficient to support one's household in a dignified manner, to private property and economic initiative, and to free association with other workers to protect their rights collectively. The Church strongly defends the right of workers to freely choose to form unions and associations to exercise their dignity and protect their rights. The Church also endorses productive partnerships between labor and management and encourages both to move beyond strictly adversarial relationships for the common good. The bottom line for the Church is that the economy exists for people, not people for the economy.

The Church's social teaching on labor affirms our American emphasis on hard work, but it also challenges us. How can we help our society promote the creation of jobs at living wages? What can we do to counter an uncritical anti-union stance taken by many? How can we help bridge the gulf that often exists between owners and workers?

Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use an image, "anoints" us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts. —Pope Francis

A Closer Look at The Lord's Prayer

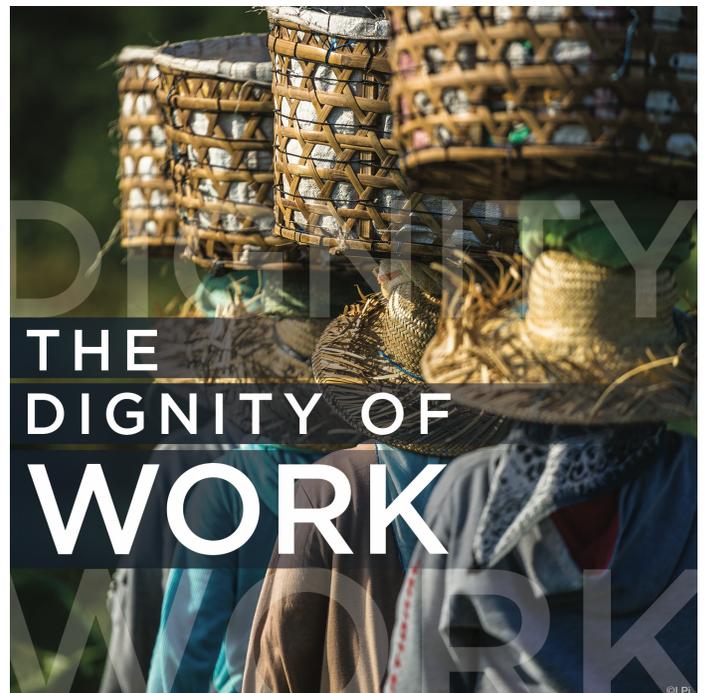
The Lord's Prayer is the only prayer formula attributed to Jesus himself in the Gospels. You'll find it in two places: Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes it as a "summary of the whole Gospel." (CCC, 2761) When understood properly and embraced fully, it is our clearest blueprint for building the kingdom Jesus proclaimed. Let's take a look at these words:

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...”

What is temptation? Temptation is wanting to do something that you know is wrong. When we ask God “to lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,” we are asking God to help us make good choices, to keep us safe, and to protect us from the things that hurt others and push us away from God.

“We must remember that we are never alone. Some of us may be far away from God, hostile; we may even claim to be ‘godless.’ But the Gospel of Jesus Christ reveals to us that God cannot be without us. He will never be a ‘manless’ God. It is he who cannot be without us, and this is a great mystery! God cannot be God without man! What a great mystery this is! And this certainty is the source of our hope, which we find enshrined in all the invocations of the Our Father. When we need help, Jesus does not tell us to deal with it and go it alone, but to turn to the Father and ask him with trust. All of our needs, from the most obvious and everyday ones like food, health, and work, to that of being forgiven and sustained in temptation, are not the mirror image of our solitude. Instead, there is a Father who always looks at us with love, and who certainly does not abandon us...”

—Pope Francis



An examination of Conscience In light of Catholic Social Teaching

- ✚ As a worker, do I give my employer a fair day's work for my wages? As an owner, do I treat workers fairly?
- ✚ Do I treat all workers with whom I interact with respect, no matter their position or class?
- ✚ Do I support the rights of all workers to adequate wages, health insurance, vacation and sick leave?
- ✚ Do I affirm their right to form or join unions or worker associations?
- ✚ Do my purchasing choices take into account the hands involved in the production of what I buy?
- ✚ When possible, do I buy products produced by workers whose rights and dignity were respected?

From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops