



The Holy See

MORNING MASS IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

"Work is the vocation of man"

Friday, 1st May 2020

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Introduction

Today is the feast of Saint Joseph the worker, and it is also Workers' Day. Let us pray for all workers. For all of them. May no-one be without employment, and may all be fairly paid, that they might earn both the dignity of their work and the beauty of rest.

Homily

"God created" (*Gen 1:27*). A Creator. He created the world, He created man, and He gave man and woman a mission: to manage, to work with and bring forward creation. And the Bible uses the word "work" to express this activity of God: He "completed the *work* He had been doing. He rested on the seventh day... after all His *work* of creating" (*Gen 2:2*). And he gives this activity to man: "You need to do this, take care of this and that, you need to work so as to create with me," as if he were saying this, "so that this world might continue" (see *Gen 2:15, 19-20*). To the point that work is none other than the continuation of God's work: human work is man's vocation received from God at the end of the creation of the universe.

Work makes the human person similar to God, because with work man is a creator, capable of creating, of creating many things; also of creating a family to raise. The human person is a creator, and creates through work. This is his vocation, and it says in the Bible that "God saw all He had made, and indeed it was very good" (*Gen 1:31*). That is, work had goodness within itself and

creates the harmony of things - beauty, goodness - and involves man in everything: in his thought, his actions, everything. Man is involved in work. It is man's first vocation: to work. And this gives dignity to man. The dignity that makes him resemble God. The dignity of work.

Once, a man went to Caritas, a man who had no employment and went to ask for help for his family. An employee of Caritas, who gave him something to eat, said to him, "At least you can take some food home". "But this is not enough for me", was the answer. "I want to earn the food I take home". He was lacking the dignity, that dignity of "making" the bread himself, through work, and taking it home. The dignity of work, which is trampled on, unfortunately.

Throughout history we have read about the brutality inflicted on slaves: they were brought from Africa to America - I think of that history that touches my own land - and we say, "What barbarism!" But there are many slaves today too, many men and women who are not free to work; they are forced to work in order to survive, nothing more. They are slaves: it is forced labour. It is forced labour, unjust, ill-paid, and which leads men and women to live with their dignity trampled underfoot. There are many, many throughout the world. Many. In the newspapers a few months ago we read, in a country in Asia, of how a man had beaten to death an employee who earned less than half a dollar a day, because he had done something badly. Today's slavery is our "indignity", because it takes away the dignity of men, of women, all of us. "No, I work, I have my dignity". Yes, but your brothers and sisters do not. "Yes, Father, it is true, but this, since it is very far away from me, I struggle to understand it. But they are among us; yes, here among us. Think of the day workers, who are made to work for minimum pay, and not for eight, but for twelve or fourteen hours a day: this happens today, here. Throughout the world, and also here. I think of the domestic worker who does not receive a fair wage, who has no social security assistance, insurance, no pension provision: this does not only happen in Asia. It happens here.

Every injustice inflicted on a person who works tramples on human dignity; and also the dignity of the one who does this injustice. It lowers the level and we end up with that tension that exists between a dictator and a slave. Instead, the vocation that God gives us is so good: to create, to re-create, to work. But this can be done when the conditions are right and the dignity of the person is respected.

Today let us join with many men and women, believers and non-believers, who commemorate Workers' Day, the day of work, for those who fight for justice in the world of work, for those - the good employers - who manage their businesses fairly, even if they themselves lose as a result. Two months ago I spoke on the telephone to a businessman, here in Italy, who asked me to pray for him because he did not want to lay off any of his workers, and said, "Because to lay off one of them is like firing myself". This conscience of so many employers who are good, who take care of their employees as if they were their own children. Let us pray for them too. And let us ask Saint Joseph, with this beautiful image [a statue standing near the altar] with the tools of his trade in his hand, that he might help us fight for the dignity of work, so that there may be work for everyone

and that the work may be dignified. Not slave labour. May this be our prayer today.

Spiritual Communion

Those who cannot receive sacramental Communion may make a spiritual communion:

At Your feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer You repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in Your holy presence. I adore You in the Sacrament of Your love, the ineffable Eucharist. I desire to receive You into the poor dwelling that my heart offers you. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental communion, I wish to possess You in spirit. Come to me, O Jesus, since I, for my part, am coming to You! May Your love embrace my whole being in life and in death. I believe in You, I hope in You, I love You.