

Why I Am Catholic: The Church's commitment to, and concern for, workers.

On this Labor Day weekend, we take time for reflection about the Catholic Church's dedication to issues that affect workers and the workplace. We first echo the words of Psalm 90: "May the favor of the Lord our God be ours. Prosper the work of our hands. Prosper the work of our hands." (vs. 17) Jesus tells us: "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life." (Jn. 6:27) St. Paul reminds us: "Each one must examine his own work" (Gal 6:4) and "the work of each will come to light." (I Cor 3:13) And that: "if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat." (II Thess 3:10)

God has spoken through the Church about the value of work, respect and justice for workers in the workplace, and our solidarity and the uniting of all human beings through labor. The Church has contributed to the dialogue about rights of owners and workers and helped with labor disputes in many different countries under many different circumstances.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that: "In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work.

"Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community." (2428)

"Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. . . Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive.

"By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification." (2427)

In *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*, the U.S. Bishops present key economic and labor principles:

- *A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.*
- *All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g. food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, economic security).*
- *All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefit, to decent working conditions, as well as to organize and join union or other associations. (USCCB Labor Day Statement 2007)*

The Church has mediated labor disputes and intervened in situations involving "sweat shops", human trafficking, and other bad labor environments, seeking the well being of people, justice, and equality. One famous example of Church support is the Polish shipyard workers under the leadership of Lech Walesa. Walesa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983. This labor movement contributed to the fall of Communism.

"The Church makes a judgment about economic and social matters when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it. She is concerned with the temporal common good of men because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, their ultimate end." (2458)