



**From A Bishop's Journal (763)**

### **Happy Labour Day!**

**A**t every eucharistic celebration we offer bread and wine to the Lord, fruit of the earth and fruit of the vine, but also the fruit of our hands. There could be no Mass without this precious and indispensable involvement of our brothers and sisters. On this Labour Day, I want to celebrate and offer our gratitude to all of those who day after day are involved in this beautiful mission in our world, those workers involved in the myriad jobs needed for our survival and comfort.

#### **A Special Prayer**

In the name of the Church, I offer this prayer for all the workers and for those who would love to work, but whose age, illness, or unemployment prevents them: "You ask humankind, Creator God, to perfect itself from day to day and to complete with its labour the immense work of your creation. Make that all men and women have working conditions that respect their dignity so that, as they strive to improve their dignity, they do so in a spirit of solidarity and service." I can see in my mind and heart the countless number of people at work, some with happiness and determination, and others filled with worry and lack of vitality. They are many hundreds of workers working to the sweat of their brows or defying the highest level of tolerance. I see them in the fields and forests, the mills and recycling plants, the most varied services, in companies and associations, in places of learning and health care services, in pastoral and government work, in research and development.

#### **Precariousness**

In my prayers and daily concern the sight of these workers unfolds before my eyes, some of them working tirelessly as volunteers all the year through, and others working generously without any marginal benefits. I see those with small salaries and minimum wages, and those in extremely precarious situations, for short-term work and impossible shifts for parents of families, and for jobs they have not been trained for. Then there are all these young people who have sent out countless resumes to possible employers, listing their courses of study and the government projects they were involved in as summer work. I also see all those 20 to 25 year-olds as well as others between 60 and 65 who stand idle in our towns and villages, who even roam from province to province, looking for a job to keep themselves and their families out of misery. Precariousness and poverty often go together, a long cry from the biblical ideal of peace and justice that go hand in hand.

## **A Simple Servant**

On this fortieth anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther king Jr., I would like to quote some of the words he addressed in Memphis, the day before his death: “I know a man about whom I would like to say a few words, and perhaps you shall discover who I am talking about, because he is a great man. All he did was to serve. He was from an out-of-the way village, the son of a poor peasant woman. He grew up in a village no less obscure, where he worked as a carpenter until he was thirty years old. Then for three years, he walked, a travelling preacher. Then he started doing things. He didn’t have much to his name. He never wrote a book. He never held any official position. He never founded a family. He never owned a house. He never went to university. He never visited great cities. He never travelled more than three hundred kilometres from his place of birth. He never did anything that the world associated with greatness. He only represented himself.

## **A Trouble Maker**

“He was thirty-three years old when popular opinion turned against him. He was accused of being a rabble rouser. He was accused of being a political agitator. He practised civil disobedience, and broke the law. And so he was delivered unto his enemies and given the parody of a trial. The irony was that he was handed over by his friends. One of his closest friends betrayed him, and the other handed him over to his enemies. And as he was dying, his murderers drew lots for his clothing, all that he owned in the world. When he died he was layed in a borrowed tomb, thanks to the pity of a friend.

## **To Serve and Do Good**

“Nineteen hundred years have passed, and today he is the one who holds the most authority in00 all the history of humankind. All the armies that ever walked into combat, all the ships that ever set sail, all the parliaments that have ever met, and all the kings who have ever reigned, have never, even all together, affected the life of man on earth than the life of this solitary man has. Sometimes someone will say, ‘He is the king of kings.’ Another says, ‘He is the Lord of lords.’ And then a third one exclaims: ‘In Christ there is neither east nor west.’ And they keep on talking: ‘In him there is neither north nor south, but one great fellowship of love from one end of this vast world to the other.’ He owned nothing. He was happy to serve and do good. You can choose to sit at his right or at his left; all you need to do is to serve. This is the only way.”

## **The Holiday of Service**

After this profound meditation of a minister who gave his life so that all men and women would be acknowledged in their human dignity, in their dignity as children of God, may Labour Day take on an unforgettable meaning. Following the example of the one who only “served” and who calls us to be of service to others, may this day become the Feast of Service, the feast of love, the feast of the gift of life. Of course, other days will come to remind us of these wonderful dimensions of service and of love as, for example Father’s Day and Mother’s Day, or Volunteer Week and Secretary Week and Workers Week, but what is important is that we marvel at and remember all those at our service day after day, that we remember all those in our parishes and municipalities, who are at the service of their brothers and sisters, and who go doing good.

## Unless the Lord...

The Chosen People marched to the rhythm of a beautiful psalm: Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep vigil (Psalm 126). This Labour Day I wish that all believers be convinced of God's presence in their work. We are right in singing: "You are there at the centre of our lives, living still, O Jesus Christ." There are different motivations to our working on monotonous or exciting days. Those who simply work for a salary do not have the same satisfaction that those who work for their families' subsistence. The one who serves his or her brothers and sisters daily builds more than a church or a cathedral: that person is a "creator with God." When God considered all He had created, he was filled with joy. "God looked at everything He had made, and found it very good." "And may the gracious care of the Lord our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us! Prosper the work of our hands!" (Psalm 90)

*+ François Thibodeau*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.  
Bishop of Edmundston

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