

SAINTS ALIVE! MAY 1: ST. JOSEPH, PATRON SAINT OF WORKERS



On May 1, we celebrate the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker. Joseph is the patron saint of workers.

Jesus was a carpenter's son. Joseph was a carpenter. Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, reminds us of the dignity and importance of work. (Pope Francis)

Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work gives the ability to maintain oneself and one's family. The father of friend of mine would say, "work is sacred...that's how you feed your family."

But work is much more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. This alone demands that the dignity of work must be protected. This protection requires that the basic rights of workers must be respected -- the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative. (U.S. Catholic Bishops)

The feast of St. Joseph the Worker was established by Pope Pius XII in 1955 to give all workers a model and a protector. Pope Pius XII expressed the hope that this feast would emphasize the dignity of labor. A little more than a decade later, society began to ebb away at labor's dignity. The waves of antipathy have yet to abate and roll back out to the waters of justice.

Take the minimum wage, for example:

The minimum wage in 1948 (in 2012 dollars) was \$7.25. (Nothing has changed: the federal minimum wage today is \$7.25.)

Then beginning in 1948, the minimum wage was indexed to *productivity growth*. This lasted until 1968, when the minimum wage was indexed to *prices*. To this day, the U.S. continues to index the minimum wage to prices.

The minimum wage would need to be \$10.10 to have the same purchasing power as the minimum wage in 1968 (in 2014 dollars). (At \$9.10, Oregon's minimum wage is the second highest in the country.)

If the minimum wage was still indexed to productivity growth, the minimum wage in 2014 dollars would be \$17.00. Yet 40% of today's males – and 50% of women – will earn less than \$17.00/hour.

The Catholic bishops of the United States have long held that the most effective way to build a just economy that reduces inequality is by creating jobs that pay a living wage.

Our Catechism is even stronger on this point: "A Just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account. 'Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural, and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good.' Agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages." *Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2434*

Today, when economic policies run contrary to Catholic teaching ("The economy must serve people, not the other way around"), let us pray to St. Joseph the Worker for a just economy that protects all workers and ensures them their work is dignified.



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