



## From A Bishop's Journal (713)

### Is Work a Holiday?

In North America the first Monday in September is known as “Labour Day,” while in other parts of the world the holiday is more and more celebrated on May 1, “Workers Day.” Some have told me that the May celebration comes more from the workers themselves while the September holiday was established by employers for their workers. However, when we really consider it, is work a holiday?

#### Broken Bodies

Besides having my brothers and sisters involved in pastoral work, I was blessed with meeting people from all kinds of work backgrounds, and of every condition. For some of them who are manual labourers, such as woods workers, highway department employees, miners, construction workers, or doing shift work in mills, work is a heavy burden of 8 to 10 hours' duration every day, and they come home exhausted. The same can also be said of a number of industrial and commercial services: heavy work schedules gradually have a negative effect on both mind and body.

#### Pastoral Visits

In the course of the parish visits I have had the privilege of making since my coming to the diocese in 1994, one of my greatest pleasures and greatest discoveries has been my visits to the different workplaces in the diocese. I encountered much genuine ingenuity and cleverness, skillfulness and solidarity, hand in hand with the demanding work that had to be done every day, at times under difficult conditions. One day, with a brother priest who did not lack work – far from it – and who was giving his all for his parishioners, and with members of his pastoral team, I had a three-hour visit of one of the major workplaces in our milieu. We were given a warm welcome, and we had the opportunity to meet men and women who were hard at work: their faces showed that they were tired, the noise was frightening, and the smells were not the most agreeable. My brother priest commented, at the end of the visit which was worth more than a session of spiritual renewal: “I understand better the young parents who, despite everything, attend pastoral and catechetical meetings with their children, but I also understand those tired and exhausted parents who cannot join us, in the evening.”

#### Work Forbidden

However, while I met quite gifted, competent, and happy workers, I also met some who could no longer work because of their health, their age, lack of work, or other reasons such as being laid off,

incompetence, generational and even racial prejudice. “Retirement” is not always “Golden Age” where the retired look back nostalgically at the “better times” when they felt “useful,” those times when they met many people and had many friends. Some are even ashamed of “sitting on the porch” during the day, despite the fact that during their work years they accumulated overtime credits and were involved in just about every type of volunteer work imaginable. And what about those in hospitals, victims of accidents with bodies broken forever, and who can no longer return to their regular work?... What about these “young” 40, 50 and 55 year-olds who have been summarily laid off and who must wait for months before finding another job? For “them,” it was “the good old days,” when they could work; for them, work could be a “holiday...”

## **Gratitude**

In this Labour Day “week,” I admire and am grateful in the first place to all my collaborators: without their constant support, I could not carry out my episcopal ministry. I think of all the priests in the diocese without exception: their small number – there are only 29 of them in the territory of the diocese of Edmundston – the extra work the bishop and the faithful ask them to do, the new services in family- and parish-based catechetics, family and social ministry, at every parish, pastoral unit, and diocesan level, fill me with admiration and gratitude. With each and every one of you, I express a grateful thank you. My gratitude also extends to all those who support them year in, year out in all their pastoral activities. Thank you to all our workers everywhere: they are working today at building our Madawaska, Restigouche, and Victoria Counties of tomorrow. It is sometimes only after a long period of time that we can see what our workers have accomplished in years past. The Trans Canada Highway is a typical example of this: What would our “national” highway be like without the work done by our people to “level the hills” and “make the path straight?” What would our health services, our individual and community services be like, without the input of all these workers who carry on until the wee hours of the morning? What would homes be like without the work of heads of families – men or women – who give the best they have for the welfare of their own? What would our world be like without the priceless involvement of our brothers and sisters in our armed forces?

## **Earnest Prayers**

With the whole Church I pray daily for all the workers. “Creator God, you ask all humankind to perfect itself day after day, and to accomplish through its work the immense task of creation: make that every man and woman enjoy working conditions that are respectful of their dignity. That through improving their lot they may act in solidarity and in a spirit of service.” And this: “Father all good, you who gave the earth to man and woman to look after it and make it produce, that they might progress by helping one another, grant that we may work with a filial spirit towards you and a spirit of fellowship with one another.” And this beautiful prayer: “God who continually creates the universe, you wanted to associate man and woman in your work. Look at the work of our hands; may it help us earn our daily bread, may it be useful to those we look after, and may it serve in the coming of the Kingdom.”

## **The Worker *Par Excellence!***

The God of the universe is described in this way, in the Book of Amos: “Him who formed the mountains and created the wind, and declares to man his thoughts; who made the dawn and the darkness, and strides upon the heights of the earth: the Lord, the God of hosts by name.” The entire Bible is not averse to show us the Lord at work in His creation, and it also shows Him at rest, on the

seventh day. The Lord constantly involves man and woman in His work. And the Church teaches us in its liturgy to make of our workdays a “feast”: “Lord, you have brought us to the beginning of this new day; help us today with your power, so that in our thoughts, words, and deeds, we may seek the justice of your Kingdom.” Every day we humbly address this prayer to the Lord: “Lord Jesus, source of life, enrich the work of our hands today.” Convinced that “unless the Lord build the house, the builders toil in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchers watch in vain,” we pray: “Strengthen the work of our hands, yes, strengthen the work of our hands. May the kindness of the Lord our God be upon us!”

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09-05-07