

# Dignity of Labour



St. Pope John Paul II was a great soul who was raised to the throne of St. Peter from the humble granite quarries, in Poland. He decreed an Encyclical, in September, 1981 on 'Human Work' (*Laborem exercens*). This encyclical affirms the dignity of work and praises labour at the centre of social perspective. It further confirms that human beings are proper subjects of work. Work expresses and increases human dignity. The Pope stresses the priority of labour over things. He supports the workers and unions while outlining a spirituality of work. Through human labour man tries to transform environment and above all himself making tremendous advances in the society. Through human labour men construct and reconstruct cultures and civilizations in his society.

### **Necessity of Labour**

Any human activity using intellectual, mental and bodily capabilities to make this world more beautiful and useful can be called Labour. Through work man can express his creativity and achieve progress of further development.

Labour is the most accepted and dignified means of one's livelihood. One who hesitates to work, one who is indolent or lazy, is considered as thief and one who labours can lead a life of dignity with a sense of satisfactory. The famous scientist Thomas Alwa Edison says, "Nothing worthwhile has been achieved free of cost. All those discoveries and inventions are realized out of my hard work... I call upon the attention of all those who resort to alcohol as painkillers may take up work as the best medicine"

### **All Kinds of Works are Noble**

Human society will not exist without doing labour and it makes steady progress only with the diversity of works. Any kind of labour which is not undertaken to cheat others or cause any damage will be worth doing irrespective of the menial work or the white collar job. Both are necessary for the welfare of the society. One who hesitates to do any work is considered to be a man with no nobility.

Certain jobs may be considered comparatively more important depending on the availability of resources and climatic changes. At some places work availability may be very less. Now for example agriculture is treated as depressed sector. In the recent times, we noticed people ignore agricultural works. The reason seems to be that it demands more toil and brings less dividends. But we know that agriculture has been the substantial, primary work and engagement to man on Earth in all times and it has been the main source of sustenance and development. Agricultural activities are considered to be wholesome exercises that help to maintain health in mind and body, with a sense of contentment. The Encyclical, 'Mater et Magistra', of Pope John XXIII (1961 May 15), deals in details on the importance of agriculture and agricultural workers. The encyclical confirms that agricultural workers are principal agents of development and they have dignity from God. They are persons very close to God, the creator. Lives of great men teach to make our lives sublime. So put your shoulder to the wheel. Don't wait for a big job to come along. Seize small ones. The excellence of a circle lies in its roundness, not in its bigness. The greatest geniuses have been the greatest workers. It is the laborious and painstaking men who are the rulers of the world.

### **Participation in the Work of Creation**

By means of his labour man participates in the work of creation. Human work proceeds directly from the persons created in the image of God and he is called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the Earth.

God is love and in his infinite love he embraces the whole universe through creative activities. God wants to continue His creative works and manifest his love through human labour. It is through human labour society makes progress and grows to perfection. Human efforts shape things to a new height and to necessary transformation. Human hands can shape a stone to palace and a barren land to fertile and fruitful place. God is ever active both in creation of preservation through His love. The world is raised to its maturity through human works. All things are developed and transformed by human works. The stones are turned to be castles and palaces, the waste land to fertile land are all examples of human efforts.

Anyone who is engaged in any kind of work is called to participate with God, irrespective of the nature or places of work, whether in the field, factories, offices, streets, air or in water. They are collaborators of God to continue the work and to the completion of the same. Through their works Christians are called to unfold the creators own work. They are partners in perfecting God's creation.

### **Works is Worship**

Human work is an expression of creativity and spirituality. Christians are called to become co-creators with God. Labour helps man to earn money to meet his primary needs such as, food, shelter, clothing and other necessities of day to day life. So work is a means of livelihood. Work gives us peace of mind and happiness. Labour has been considered as a kind of prayer if it is done sincerely and with total commitment. Persons who are engaged in labour are something noble. They work for the glory of God. They will have the will to pray for the workers who work hard

for themselves and for others. Labour is a service to the humanity. So we consider work as worship. Work has got transforming power when it is united with Christ. A Christian can find in human work a small part of the cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption. We can find in many great and holy people who have considered their work as a form of worship. Humans share in the activity of God as the work imitates God's activity that gives its dignity. Jesus himself was a person of work, as a model for us.

To do one's work sincerely is an expression of life based on Christian faith. As we said Jesus is the model for our works. One who works with due commitment and bears with the hardship of pains attached to it will be following Jesus, the real model for our life. Work allows people to fulfill their vocation. Work is sharing in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Work is made holy through Christ Jesus. Through work, one can bear witness to Jesus Christ and by work itself we can share with the suffering and redemptive activity of Christ. A worker can make sure the presence of Jesus at the place of work. A worker can be a missionary of Christ. Worker is participating with the creative activity of God and he can proclaim Jesus' Mission by being disciplined, responsible, and punctual in his task undertaken. In this way a Christian can perform his work with the sense of worship. Thus work is necessary for earthly progress and the development of the Kingdom of God.

### **Work is Duty**

Work honours the creator's gift and the talents received from Him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus of Nazareth, the Carpenter man collaborates in a certain fashion with the son of God in redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying his cross in his daily works. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family and of serving the community. There is no doubt, work is our duty. In the Bible we can see instances on the need and importance of work. "Six days, you shall labour and do all your Work" (Deut. 5/13). Life is sweet for the self-reliant and the worker (Sirah. 40/18). Once while addressing the followers Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).

St. Paul, Pioneer missionary the world has ever seen, stressed on the need of work repeatedly: "and we grow weary from the work of our own hands" (1 Cor. 4/12). In his letter to the Thessalonians the apostle reaffirms, "We did not eat any one's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you" (II Thes. 3/8) and again St. Paul instructs: "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat", (II Thes. 3/10). Now, he writes to the church of Ephesus: "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy" (Eph. 4/28).

Work is part of life. Work is the key to making life more human. Work is an obligation as it is necessary for earthly progress. Philosopher, Joseph Comard says "Man by nature, is a labourer, if he does not toil he becomes a zero". Nature has ordained man to earn his livelihood with sweat of his brow. The church teaches in the document of II Vatican Council, on 'The Church is the Modern World': 'Human activity proceeds from man, it is also ordered to him. When he works, not only

does he transform matter and society but he fulfills himself. He learns, he develops his faculties and he emerges from and transcends himself. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is more precious than any kind of wealth that can be amassed. It is what a man is rather than what he has, that counts. (GS 35).

We are ordained to earn 'our daily bread' with our hard labour. With our continued labour, we learn more and more, develop our talents and thereby. We contribute to the prosperity of the society. It is also the duty of the labour to seek "Suitable work according to his tastes and talents, find out prospects to progress of his work, pray for favorable labour environment. Pray for employers and customers etc. Always remember it's divine providence that grants mans strength of work and prosperity. Work is a blessing for a man to fulfill his duties.

### **Wages for Workers**

Wages are practical means where by people can have access to goods intended for the common use. It is the remuneration of labour done. Majority of the workers depend on wages for livelihood. Just remuneration of workers is the key for social justice. Everyone who works has a right to get sufficient wages to support a family. There are instances where people trying to exploit, earn remuneration without doing anything. They are the cause of economic injustice. They do not take up the pain of working hard. Wages must be fixed based on social and individual considerations.

Wages must be sufficient enough to sustain life, dignity and foster rights of families. Social benefits for workers are also needed including health care, right to leisure, pension, and accident – insurance and decent work environment.

### **Labour, Social Perspective**

Work has got its social dimensions. Work is intimately related to human life. God has fixed in an individual for a specific task needed for the community. Labour presupposes common good of the society. It has value in as much as it ensures or it serves individual's basic needs. The social nature of work is well recognized. Work helps to develop social existence beyond the provisions of basic goods. The noblest social goal of work is to provide the basis for a culture in which all can realize their fullest human potential. Worker can enter into a process of giving and taking, providing and consuming the community's goods. Labour is the index of the growth rate of a nation. No man lives and works for himself. Work must serve an individual's humanity and dignity. Knowingly or unknowingly he/she works in association with others. In this respect, work is a social power and it promotes human fraternity. Labour is the most effective service to humanity. As we know we enjoy the fruits of the labour of others. So a worker shall be a good collaborator and a service minded person who can extend best of his service and co-operation to the welfare of others. A nation can make steady progress through the dedicated workers of its citizens.

There is no doubt that unemployment makes the lives of people miserable. It is necessary to create more job opportunities and make use of the same with co-operation, co-ordination and good-will of the employers as well as employees. This attitude paves the way of



further development and prosperity, both for the worker and for the society. A peaceful work-culture will promote virtues of independence, responsibility and inter personal sensitivities. Our consideration on the work is the primacy of the workers, and the second priority must be what it does for the individual and the humanity. Love labour and it is wholesome for your body and your mind.

### **I. Let us Discuss**

1. All works are noble and important. How can we promote the above stated point of view in the society?
2. It is equally wrong not paying just wages to the employees and demand remuneration by a person who does not work at all.

### **II. Let us find out the Answers**

1. What is your understanding of the word Labour?
2. What do you mean by saying; work is a participation in the creative activity of God?
3. Work is worship, Explain.
4. To live by toiling is an obligation of human being. Clarify the statement.
5. Work is necessary for the development and prosperity of human society. Justify.

### **III. Activity**

Collect some of the sayings of the great men, pieces of stories, events and poems which exemplify the dignity and sanctity of labour.

### **IV. Let us Read and Reflect**

II Thessalonians 3: 6-13.