

Catholic Social Teaching Series for Lent 2019

For Week 7, the Catholic Social Teaching principle is:

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

From our U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: “The economy must serve people not the other way around. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then 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.”

More about Kayla and Joe:

Kayla for a while had been pondering a lot about what type of work she would like to do as a young adult. She asked her friends and other people she trusted to help her identify her gifts.

She even reconnected with her high school guidance counselor for a one-on-one discussion. Many of these people, in turn, asked her what she felt energized about. After numerous good discussions with her family, friends, and many others along with a lot of soul searching, she decided she wanted to somehow get into the medical field. She felt a “pull” to help others that were in need of medical help and she felt confident she could handle details of

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medical work. Many people encouraged her by saying that even if she tried one type of medical work and it was not a good fit that she could change and try another type. One friend even encouraged her to dream big based on potential that this friend saw in Kayla. She knew it could be a tough journey without much financial support from her family, but she was determined and entered the medical field with excitement and determination. Kayla also had an older friend who she looked up to that was content with her own work in the medical field.

Joe had decided while in college to focus on communication methods written, oral and social media communications. The college he had started at had some communication courses, but it did not offer a complete major focus in communication methods. So, Joe had to make a big decision – would he leave his college friends and other connections and start over at another school. Would his parents support his decision?



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Reflecting and Following up on Kayla’s and Joe’s situations:

Kayla had numerous people that she felt comfortable turning to for guidance, and thankfully she took advantage of those opportunities. Many years later, Kayla returned and thanked those people for the time they took to help encourage and guide her, including her

high school guidance counselor! Kayla wound up being the first person in her family to graduate with a 4-year college degree and got a sought-after job soon after graduating.

Joe, in some ways, had a tougher time than Kayla despite having more advantages earlier in his life. Joe chose the field of communications and switched schools but never got as connected at his second school as at his first school. He struggled through college and did not get any job offers at first after graduating with a 4-year degree while, at the same time, accumulating financial debt. So, he took a year-long commitment with a volunteer initiative that would pay his current room and board and delay loan repayment as long as he worked responsibly and did the work that the initiative needed to meet its commitments. The work focused on communities that had been heavily damaged by storms and other disasters inside and outside the United States. After the year of volunteer service, Joe will need to decide how to proceed with his life. Opportunities remain for him despite some struggles.

What happens in our society when a person pursues work based on her (or his) gifts, but the match with available jobs does not allow the person to support her (or him) self? For example, if a person's gifts or aptitude are, for example, with fixing things and the person has little interest in further education, should that person be eligible for reasonable-wage work like a person that has completed additional education?

Scripture passages:

“At the end of every third year, you shall bring out all the tithes of your produce for that year and deposit them within your own communities, that the Levite who has no hereditary portion with you, and also the resident alien, the orphan and the widow within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied; so that the LORD, your God, may bless you in all that you undertake.” (The Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 14, Verses 14 and 15).

“Then he (Jesus) said to them, The sabbath was made for man,^[a] not man for the sabbath.” (Mark's Gospel, Chapter 2, Verse 27).

Reflection about these Scripture passages:

The book of Deuteronomy describes from thousands of years ago the importance of rights for all people regardless of their work opportunities. How important is it today that as a society we implement this compassion with our current work practices?

Have we lost somewhat the importance of rest in our own work patterns?

More to Consider:

- Work is God's gift to us. All workers have a right to dignified, safe work and reasonable rest when not working. Workers also have responsibilities to work responsibly for wages and benefits received.
- Every purchase we make influences those who produce what we purchase. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation.

- Where is the dignity of work or the rights of workers violated or protected— both in our own community and around the world?

Church Tradition:

“The obligation to earn one’s bread by the sweat of one’s brow also presumes the right to do so. A society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace.”

—St. John Paul II, *The Hundredth Year (Centessimus Annus)*, no. 43

“In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or “because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.”

- Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth*, no. 63)

Prayer:

“Oh Lord, continue to help us all to connect our gifts with our work and with our other actions. And help us also to realize that our purchasing actions as millions of people when looked at have as a whole a huge effect on our economic system. We ask too that employers consider this teaching about the right to dignified work and that profit not be the only motive when making decisions that affect employees. Amen!

NEXT WEEK: The final input for this series on Catholic Social Teaching Principles will be next week where we will summarize the principles and consider some possible steps for faithful people going forward. We will also send off Joe and Kayla.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website (usccb.org) says that Catholic Social Teaching is a “central and essential element of our faith. Its roots are in the Hebrew prophets (like Isaiah and Jeremiah). Catholic Social Teaching is founded on the life and words of Jesus Christ.

If you have any questions or comments about any part of this series or if you wish to discuss any of these principles, please feel free to contact Debbie Krisher at the Parish Office or Dave Babcock (dave.babcock21@gmail.com). Scripture citations are from the New American translation of the bible.