

Sept 5, 2021 - 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Is 35:4-7a

Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

Jas 2:1-5

Mk 7:31-37

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/090521.cfm>

Catholics in the United States are fortunate enough to have two “Labor Days” on their calendars. In the universal Church, we honor those who labor on the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, May 1. But in America Labor Day is the first Monday in September. This Sunday many of our neighbors are looking ahead to barbecues, picnics and other family events. But Labor Day is about much more than this, and the lectionary offers us a particularly apposite reading from the Letter of James.

James is among Scripture’s most emphatic tribunes of social justice, vindicating the cause of the workers and the poor against the rich. In one memorable passage he thunders: “Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries.... Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts (James 5:1,4).” Today’s reading focuses instead on how sin can lead us to unjustly honor the wealthy while despising the poor.

If a man with gold rings and fine clothes  
comes into your assembly,  
and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in,  
and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes  
and say, “Sit here, please,”  
while you say to the poor one, “Stand there,” or “Sit at my feet, ”  
have you not made distinctions among yourselves  
and become judges with evil designs? (James 2:1-4)

As a society, have we become judges with evil designs? The experience of COVID has been illustrative. As the pandemic spread at the start of last year, tens of millions of restaurant, hotel and other workers found themselves shut out of employment – we came together to extend unemployment benefits to them, which was to the good, but most faced loss of health care and housing insecurity. As to those “essential workers” in our hospitals, supermarkets and subways, who remained on duty at risk to their own health, we honored them as “heroes” but too often left them without proper protective equipment, virus testing or sick leave. Isn’t that a lot like those James castigated, those who tell their

brother or sister in need “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but... do not give them the necessities of the body? (James 2:16)”

The Church teaches that every man or woman in society has intrinsic dignity and worth, no matter how humble their occupation. And Catholic social teaching holds that every worker deserves a living wage and safe working conditions. The very notion of “working poor” is a scandal in a society as rich as ours. This Labor Day let us resolve to continue the fight for justice for all workers, following the exhortation of James: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22).”

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