

Reflection Monday 4th Week Easter St Joseph the Worker 2023

The feast of Saint Joseph the Worker promotes the value of work and of the worker. A worker such as St Joseph is not a mere lump of labour – “1.00 human work units.” He is a person. He is created in God’s image, and just as creation is an activity of God, so creation is an activity of the worker. The work we do echoes the glorious work that God has done. It may not be wasted; or abused; or improperly paid; or directed to wrong or pointless ends. To do any of these things is not oppression, it is sacrilege. The glory of the present economic system is that when it gives so many, of whatever class, the chance to build and create something worthwhile, whether from their own resources, or in collaboration with others, or by attracting investment from others. But its shame is when that does not happen: when people are coerced, by greed or by poverty, into being “lumps of labour.” Whether the labour is arduous or not makes no difference; whether it is richly paid or not makes no difference.

Because she combats the anti-humanist Communist heresy, the Church is thought to be on the side of capital. Reading the successive Papal encyclicals on labour and society, from *Rerum Novarum* (1891) onwards, will dispel that illusion. The enemies of the Church have no reason to read them; too often, though, we feel too comfortable in our present economic state and refrain from reading them too.

Rerum Novarum: *Equity therefore commands that public authority show proper concern for the worker so that from what he/she contributes to the common good he/she may receive what will enable him/her, to be housed, clothed, and secure, to live life without hardship. Whence, it follows that all those measures ought to be favoured which seem in any way capable of benefiting the condition of workers. Such solicitude is so far from injuring anyone, that it is destined rather to benefit all, because it is of absolute interest to the State that those citizens should not be miserable in every respect from whom such necessary goods proceed.* (#51)