

Winding her way through the office cubicles, an office manager spotted one of her employees playing a video game on the computer. "Why aren't you working?" the office manager asked. The employee had an excellent excuse "I didn't see you coming." Happy Labor Day!

Most people have mixed feelings about work. When speaking of their jobs, it's not uncommon for them to grouse about "the rat race" and "the grind." Yet many people -- often, the very same ones -- also take great satisfaction from their work. Both of those things, satisfaction and frustration, are linked to a fundamental fact. For better or worse, most of us draw much of our self-identity from work.

Notice how often new acquaintances, introducing themselves, start by naming their jobs: "I'm a computer programmer," "... an accountant," "... a teacher," "... a housewife." In many cases, it seems, identity equals work. Which is why, incidentally, the high unemployment rate of recent years, along with hurting people in the pocketbook, has for many been a blow to their self-image.

Less obvious perhaps, but no less important, work also occupies an important place in our spiritual lives.

*Ora et labora* -- "pray and work" -- is a famous monastic motto. It's a beautiful thought, of course, but also somewhat questionable to the extent it's taken as suggesting a sharp distinction, a split, between prayer and work. In the life of virtue, the two things go together and merge into one, so that work itself is a kind of prayer. In a broad sense, everyone has work to do.

"Work" isn't just paid employment, a job. It includes volunteer work, housework, schoolwork, baby-sitting for family and friends, helping out around the parish -- the 1,001 useful things that people do to be of service, build a better world and give glory to God. A number of individual good habits -- virtues, that is -- are obviously relevant and important in regard to work. Those that come immediately to mind include honesty, punctuality and perseverance.

Underlying them are basic beliefs and attitudes pertaining to work and forming a kind of model within which the virtues can take hold and operate.

Rob and Tom apply for the same job. They take a written test. "You both got the same number of questions wrong," the HR person tells them, "but Rob gets the job." Tom asks indignantly: "If we both got the same number of questions wrong, how come Rob gets the job?" "Well," says the HR person, "one of his incorrect answers was better

than yours." "Whoa, how can that be?" "For problem No. 46, Rob wrote 'I don't know.' You wrote, 'Me neither.' "

Suppose Question #46 for each one of us was this: "What does the Catholic Church say about labor, about work?" Historically the Catholic Church, for the most part, has managed to take a practical, down-to-earth approach to the question of work. The approach of affirming work and workers was reflected in Pope Leo XIII's landmark 1891 social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Condition of Workers"). Here the Church can be seen confronting the consequences of the Industrial Revolution by setting out a body of social teaching in response to the challenges of modern times. Since then, many other encyclicals and teaching documents have been published with the same aim in view by later pontiffs, including Popes Pius XI, Pius XII, St. John XXIII, St. Paul VI, St. John Paul II, and Benedict XVI.

In that regard, it's helpful to be aware not only that Jesus worked but that His work had the same two purposes at its core: We work to live, not live to work; and we identify ourselves more by who we are than by what we do.

During His public life, He worked as a kind of rabbi or traveling teacher. But before beginning His public life, He worked as a carpenter. And it wasn't just the work that He did during the public life, climaxed as it was by his death and Resurrection -- that had creative and redemptive value. Those meanings were present in His work throughout His life, including during the years spent working at the carpenter's trade in Nazareth. The Daily Grind was a part of his life, too.

Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley Archbishop of Oklahoma City Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development United States Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote this year's Labor Day message. Here is some of what he says:

"Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5) Rebuilding a Dignified Post-COVID World. This Labor Day is a somber one. The COVID-19 pandemic goes on. Economic circumstances for so many families are stressful or even dire. Anxiety is high. Millions are out of work and wondering how they will pay the bills.

And for workers deemed "essential" who continue to work outside the home, there is the heightened danger of exposure to the virus. Yet, as Pope Francis points out in a set of beautiful and challenging reflections on the pandemic, "In this wasteland, the Lord is committed to the regeneration of beauty and rebirth of hope: 'Behold, I am doing something new: right now it is sprouting, don't you see it?' (Is 43:19).

God never abandons his people, he is always close to them, especially when pain becomes more present.” As God declares to John in Revelation: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). God knows the challenges we face and the loss and grief we feel. The question to us is this: will we pray for and willingly participate in God’s work healing the hurt, loss, and injustice that this pandemic has caused and exposed? Will we offer all we can to the Lord to “make all things new?”

As public reports show, the virus has spread widely among essential workers such as meat packers, agricultural workers, healthcare providers, janitors, transit workers, emergency responders, and others. As a result, low wage workers, migrant workers, and workers of color, have borne a disproportionate share of the costs of the pandemic. Before the pandemic, a significant number of Americans were trapped in low wage jobs, with insecurity around food, housing, and health care, and with little opportunity for savings or advancing in their career. Those same workers have been hit particularly hard, and, it is devastating to say, many have paid with their life. As one New York subway worker put it, “We are not essential. We are sacrificial.”

What was wrong before the pandemic has been accelerated now. What may have been hidden to some is now revealed. Against this backdrop, the murders in our cities was like lighting a match in a gas-filled room. Pope Francis writes of the pandemic: “We are all frail, all equal, all precious. May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us: the time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family!” The Holy Father is now using his weekly general audience as an occasion for catechesis on Church teaching on inequalities that have been aggravated by the pandemic. The dignity of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, is not at the center of our society in the way it should be. In some workplaces, this has meant an emphasis on profits over safety. That is unjust.

Consumerism and individualism fuel pressures on employers and policy makers that lead to these outcomes. The Good News is that injustice does not need to have the last word. The Lord came to free us from sin, including the sins by which we diminish workers and ourselves. “This is the favorable time of the Lord, who is asking us not to conform or content ourselves, let alone justify ourselves with substitutive or palliative logic, which prevents us from sustaining the impact and serious consequences of what we are living.”

Beginning with our own decisions, we might ask when we buy goods from stores or online: do we know where they came from? Do we know whether the people who made them were treated with dignity and respect? Was the workplace made safe during the pandemic, and did workers receive a just wage? If not, what can we do to remedy this?

I conclude with this Prayer for Work, from *Being Neighbor: The Catechism and Social Justice*, USCCB, April 1998:

Creator God, thank you for providing us with the gift to share our talents.  
Provide our community, our nation, our world the fortitude to provide work  
for all which is decent and fair.

Make us faithful stewards of your creation to enhance the human dignity  
of our global family.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, the Lord. Amen.

## CSA Sunday/Grandparents Day

[Sirach 27:30-28:7, Psalm 103: Romans 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35]

At one of the Presbyteral Convocations up at Boyne, those every other year gatherings of the priests and bishops of the Archdiocese of Detroit, the keynote speaker asked us all: “Do you know what the word ‘ruminate’ means?” Most of us shook our heads in the negative. He then defined it for us. “It means to go over in the mind repeatedly and often, casually or slowly. It also means to chew repeatedly for an extended period. To chew again what has been chewed slightly and swallowed. To chew the cud.”

“In other words,” he continued, it’s playing in our mind all those negative tapes over and over. The negative tapes of our mistakes, our failures, the people who have wronged us or hurt us. We get sick on chewing that cud. We get indigestion. We get heart aches.” Then he hit us with the message: “For the true Christian, there is no room in our lives to ruminate.” There is no room to ruminate. It makes us sick and sicker. There is no room to ruminate!

Today’s readings offer an uncomfortable, but clear challenge to us: the challenge of forgiveness. The First Reading from the Book of Sirach reminds us to release or turn over to the Lord our anger and desire for vengeance, for it is God’s role, not ours, to punish those who have done evil to us. We are not to be vengeful; we are to forgive. “The vengeful will suffer the Lord’s vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail.” But as for us, we must forgive: “Forgive your neighbor’s injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.”

It is important to remember, however, that forgiving another does not mean absolving them of responsibility. To forgive another is to confirm that they have done wrong and are in need of forgiveness. Mercy does not cancel out justice or the need for conversion, but it does open up a path of charity that encourages and promotes conversion and justice. For the Christian in the world, we live in mercy and we long for justice, but we entrust final justice (final

conversion) always to God. As long as we believe in the power and mercy of God, we always hope for this.

I'm reminded of what a friend said to me recently: "I'm not in the revenge business. That's not in my job description. That's in God's job description!"

Note that the reason given for why we should forgive, both in Sirach and in the Psalm, is that none of us are free of sin and guilt. We are all sinners, we have all done wrong. Yet, God forgives us, and so we must forgive others. Today's Responsorial Psalm proclaims that God "has not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our deeds deserve." God treats us with forgiveness, love and compassion, and we must do the same. Remember what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Someone told me, "I no longer say the Our Father because I cannot and will not say the words, "as we forgive those who trespass against us." How sad.

Another person told me the opposite, "I don't have the time and energy to invest in hate and resentment. It takes too much out of me."

In some ways, forgiveness frees the one who forgives from carrying that burden. We can let it go and entrust the other to God, Who is better able to deal with them. The teaching on forgiveness is about being like God, Who is merciful. It is about recognizing something of ourselves in those who commit the greatest evils, for no one is free of sin. Finally, this teaching on forgiveness is about being able to live with the peace of love instead of fear and hate, which tears and destroys. It also cures our heartache – and our indigestion!

Speaking of indigestion, today is CSA Sunday! I say this because most pastors, when they receive their annual letter from the Archbishop with the new CSA parish target, their stomachs twist and turn. But seriously, folks, the Catholic Services Appeal is our chance to participate in the mission of the larger Church of the Archdiocese of Detroit. The theme for this year is "Rise and Be Not Afraid." Because of the current COVID-19 and economic situation in our country, Archbishop Allen Vigneron moved this year's CSA weekend from the first weekend in May to this weekend in September. More importantly, the Archbishop has reduced all 2020 CSA parish targets by 15%.

That means that our new CSA parish target of \$90,708 has been reduced by the Archbishop to \$77,101. The AOD has sent out all CSA information to your homes. Please send in your gift or pledge card directly to them in the envelope provided. Do not send them to the parish. Our parish will be credited with all gifts received by the AOD. This spares us a lot of local preparation and work. Let's "Rise" and "Be Not Afraid" to reach our goal!

Today also is Grandparents Day in our country, another "Hallmark moment! The Sunday in September after Labor Day has been designated to remember and honor our grandparents. Marian McQuade hoped to establish a national day that would honor grandparents, and in 1970 she began a campaign to do so. McQuade raised awareness about senior citizens throughout the 1970s. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter declared the first Sunday after Labor Day to be National Grandparents Day. Each year, the president issues a proclamation to keep the tradition going.

Grandparents Day has both an official flower and song. Both were chosen by the National Grandparents Day Council. The official flower is the forget-me-not. The official song is Johnny Prill's "A Song for Grandma and Grandpa."

Most grandparents want to spend time with their grandchildren. If you have a grandparent, ask them to show you one of their favorite hobbies. Let your grandparents teach you a skill. If your grandparent would prefer a calm day, ask them to show you their favorite classic movie.

If your grandparent does not live nearby, give them a phone call and make them a card! Even if the card doesn't arrive by Grandparents Day, they'll always appreciate a handwritten card which shows your thoughtfulness. It really is the thought that counts -- just make sure your grandparents know that you're thinking of them. All of my grandparents died when I was young, so I asked my parents to tell me stories about their family history. And if YOU are a grandparent, grab a recording device -- and leave for all posterity your favorite stories! AMEN!

## Commissioning of Confirmation Candidates/CSA Giving Day

[Readings: Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145; Philip 1:20c-24, 27a; Matt 20:1-16a]

[All Masses:] When Jesus tells a parable, he often tells a zinger of a story. Today is no exception. Almost anyone would admit that today's parable is both irritating and puzzling. Why does the landowner pay everyone the same wage regardless of how long they have worked? If I worked the full day, wouldn't I think that I deserved more pay than those who worked only one hour? Wouldn't YOU? Of course, we would! And wouldn't we feel a little irritated and wonder what Jesus is up to, maybe even wonder what He might be teaching us?

Each worker had an agreement with the landowner – one day's wage. Others were told they would get a just wage. If they all had this understanding, why can't the owner do what he wants, pay what he wants, as long as he is just?

It's never too early. It's never too late. Maybe the thoughts of Jesus are not our thoughts. Isaiah says that in today's First Reading: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." As a friend of mine says, "I've learned that things happen by God's Rolex, not my Timex!" This parable has nothing to do with work and wages. It has to do with faith. The Jewish people have lived and taught and waited for the coming of the Messiah and the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. They have been faithful to their culture and tradition for thousands of years --"dawn." But many still are not ready, willing or able to accept the Good News that Jesus brings.

So Jesus offers salvation to the Gentiles – those who have come along at "nine o'clock," "noon," "three o'clock" and "five o'clock." Those who arrive later on the scene. It's never too early. It's never too late.

Are you grateful for the graces and forgiveness God gives us, even when you don't "deserve" them? Do you resent the mercy shown others because they don't "deserve" it? All of us are equally dependent on God's generosity and love. God's love and generosity cannot be matched or outdone. Our only response, our only option, once we choose to become a Christian believer, is stewardship. Stewardship is what we do with what we have when we believe and love God.



And yet we often find it easy to complain because of what we perceive we don't have, or that someone has more than us or should get less. It's never too early. It's never too late. When we stop to think of it this way, there is another twist to the Gospel parable. Some of us were called by Jesus in our infancy and we have been faithful followers. Others were called in our youth, while still others of us received our spiritual awakening or re-awakening in our maturity, even in our old age. It's never too early. It's never too late.

No matter when Jesus called us to be His disciples, we all know others who were called later on in their lives. Should the reward be any different for any of these disciples of Jesus depending on when they answered His call?

If I lived a sinful and reckless life during the first half of my life and then lived a virtuous life the second half, should I receive less love from the Lord? Perhaps you know someone who lived such a life and now is a faithful Catholic. Should he or she be loved less, have a lesser salvation from God? God isn't like that. "So high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above yours."

That is what Jesus is telling us. God's love and salvation are available to all people, no matter when they see the light, when they seek the Lord for the first time for themselves, when they let go of the ways of the scoundrel and sinner. For it isn't by our own merit that we receive God's mercy and love; it is by the sheer generosity and grace of God's love. It is free, generous and amazing.

[5 PM Mass only:] This weekend we enroll our young people preparing for Confirmation. You who are candidates, this is a challenging time in your lives. Too old to be cute little kids and too young to be considered full-grown adults. And – Spoiler Alert – Confirmation doesn't make you an "adult" in the Church! If it did, you would be able to vote, drive a car and join the military! Confirmation is this -- your personal choice to be, to become and to live out the Catholic faith.

I challenge you this year to discover two important things: who you really are, and what GOD wants you to be when you grow up! Spoiler Alert Number Two: You are called to become a servant of the Lord.

Our Second Reading says that when we live, we live for the Lord, and when we die, we die for the Lord. Find your place in the Church now! Today!

The fullness of the Holy Spirit that we will pray for you on the day of your Confirmation will fill your soul with a new purpose, a new meaning for your life. Become an altar server, a lector, a member of our music ministry.

When it may seem more convenient to stay home on the weekend, remember that you are called to worship with us every Sunday and Holy Day. As you come to the Table of the Lord, realize that He is truly present, loving you and living inside of you when you receive Him. Come and be nourished, then go out to make Jesus Christ known and visible in the world. To your family, to your classmates, to your friends.

Pray. Talk with God daily. Give God five minutes when you wake up and five minutes before you go to bed. Talk to Jesus throughout the day as you would with a good friend. Come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

[*All Masses:*] Today, throughout the country, is Catechetical Sunday. a day to honor all who teach and learn the Catholic Faith. The 2020 Catechetical Sunday theme is taken from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, "***I Received from the Lord what I also Handed on to You.***" This theme focuses on the essential work of catechesis, which is an invitation to a whole new life given by Christ Himself. This weekend, we commission and bless our catechists and all parents, who are called to be "the first and the best" teachers of the Faith for their children. Our Faith Formation and sacramental prep sessions will be virtual within the approved guidelines. We inaugurated this with a Zoom meeting of our catechists and me.

Some catechists tell me that it's the hardest job in the world, like being thrown into the lion's den every week as a parish steward. Do you know what a parish volunteer is? One person describes it as someone who couldn't get away fast enough before getting caught and trapped!

Others describe it as a blessing, delving deeper and deeper into our relationship with Jesus and with the beauty that is the Catholic Church. The gift of teaching our children and preparing the future Church that will one day replace us all.

One catechist said, “Like most catechists, I plan careful lessons, spend far too much time creating original props I can’t find in any catalog, and watch each week as plans to teach the heck out of some religious concept get derailed by factors beyond my control. I’ve finally determined the only good lesson plan boils down to One Big Idea. If I just say one thing across the hour -- write it, say it, make them repeat it, sing it, dance it -- with any grace it may stick, and students will learn it by heart. Find One Big Idea.

And finally, two things are happening this Thursday. First is a new CSA invitation to EVERYONE to make a difference. The secular world has “Giving Tuesday,” on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving Day. For the first time ever, the Archdiocese of Detroit is going to designate one day next week, when we hope everyone in every parish will make their gift or pledge to the CSA. Tune in at **6:30 p.m. on Thursday, September 24** on the Archdiocese of Detroit web page, Facebook and YouTube channels, to our **first ever CSA Giving Day!** When you give this Thursday, you can choose where your gift or pledge will go! To any of the seven key ministries in the Archdiocese of Detroit: Vocations, Catholic Schools, Black Catholic Ministries, Hispanic Ministries, Youth and Family Ministries, Christian Services, and Communications.

We’ve never done this before, but we have faith that we can “Rise and Be Not Afraid” to reach our parish goal of \$77,101. We give thanks to God ahead of time for your support for our mission. May God bless us and may God bless the CSA! It’s never too early, it’s never too late.

The second thing that is happening this Thursday is a call to fast and pray.

For a single day, on Sept. 24, Fr. John Riccardo and his ACTS XXIX team want the entire country to stop what they’re doing and pray. The nation, torn by political and civil unrest, division and acrimony, desperately needs it, he contends. The grassroots idea for this came from none other than President Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln, in his great wisdom, had led the country in days of prayer, fasting and humiliation three times over the course of the Civil War.

“What particularly struck me was not only that he called for (this day) and the language that he used was very Christian, but also the fact that he was

calling the whole country to do this on a particular day,” Fr. Riccardo told *Detroit Catholic*. “So, rather than an ongoing call to pray every Wednesday for the rest of our lives, let’s have the whole country, all men and women of goodwill, pray for a day.” As the country remains ever more divided, only God can heal the hearts of men and women torn by division, which is necessary for true peace and unity, Fr. Riccardo said.

Lincoln called for the first of these days in 1861 on the last Thursday of September. Although not trying to carbon copy Lincoln’s proclamation, Fr. Riccardo decided to put out a similar call for prayer and fasting on the last Thursday of September 2020. Fr. Riccardo added that Sep. 24 used to be the feast of Our Lady of Ransom, also known as Our Lady of Mercy.

“It was dedicated to Mary, Our Lady of Ransom, because her son is the one who ransoms us or rescues us from captivity,” Fr. Riccardo said.

The country and the Church today are at an important crossroads, just as they were in Lincoln’s day, Fr. Riccardo believes. In order to solve problems, it’s critical to take them first to God in prayer, he said.

The nationwide day of prayer and fasting is an invitation to everyone — Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims and even atheists “who are willing to conceive there might be a God” — to join together in one mind, Fr. Riccardo said.

“We are at a place right now in the country where clearly we are going through tremendous upheaval — in the Church, in the culture, politically — there are cries of injustice and a need for unity and healing,” Fr. Riccardo said.

The problem, Fr. Riccardo said, is in our hearts.

“Politics and law and public policies are very important, but they can’t fix the problem, they can’t fix the heart. Only God can fix the heart,” he said. “In the history of the Church, what God does so often is to turn people who once were enemies not simply into people who can tolerate each other, but who can love each other and call each other brother and sister.”

To be Christian is to believe God acts in history, Fr. Riccardo added.

God acts in history and will continue to do so, Fr. Riccardo said. “He became man to rescue us, and His acts in history are not over. We are asking Him to act again right now,” he said. We are really trying to make it open to all men and women of goodwill.”

Participation might look different depending on a person’s religious affiliation and background, but Fr. Riccardo suggests Catholics consider praying at 3 p.m., the Hour of Mercy. “What would it be like if we could somehow hear and feel one another’s knees around the country hit the ground at the same time on that day, begging God for mercy, healing and conversion?” he said.

“Republicans, Democrats and Independents can set aside this day to fast until dinner and to ask for two very specific things in our prayers: for God’s mercy on our country and for the healing and conversion of our hearts,” he said.

For more information about the National Day of Prayer and Fasting or to help spread the word, [visit the ACTS XXIX website](#). AMEN!

(First Eucharist at 11 AM Mass, Respect Life Month begins)

[Readings: Ezekiel 18:25-28; Psalm 25; Philippians 2:1-11; Matt. 21:28-32]

How often have we asked ourselves or others, “Why did God do this? Why is God punishing me? Why does God allow wars, hurricanes, forest fires, earthquakes, car accidents and sickness and disease or anything else that causes us to suffer? Why did I lose my job? Why am I losing my home?” Are we being punished for the sins of our ancestors, as the people asked Ezekiel in his time? It is very easy to blame God for our suffering, but the reality is that *God has nothing to do with any of the bad things that happen to us usually good people.* It is either the consequences of nature, the evil deeds of others, or our own poor choices, messed up priorities and just plain stupid mistakes.

Stop thinking about one’s relationship in terms of [reward and punishment](#). Instead, pursue holiness. Do what is just. When one converts, turning away from sin and death, one will live. God will not punish the sinner because of the faults of his father or mother. God seeks the conversion of the individual sinner. And yet, the presumption that God must conform himself to our thin view of “fair” or “unfair” did not disappear after the Babylonian exile.

God’s will is not that we suffer, but that we be converted. Indeed, sometimes hitting rock bottom is the only way we can rise up in God’s grace and loving care. God teaches us, through the words of Ezekiel, that “corporate guilt” -- the guilt of the many -- is important, but not as important as the moral life and choices of each individual. When we want to cry out, “The Lord’s way is not fair!” we need only look at our own individual lives and choices to find the insight and the truth that we long for.

We cannot live in solidarity and service if we are not aware that every choice we make with our time, talent and treasure has an impact on others and on our world. How can we cry the Gospel from the rooftops with our lives if we are not aware of others? St. Paul uses a small but important word in his letters: the word “if.” IF we truly turn our whole selves to Jesus and follow His lead, we must freely choose to do so.

IF we want to become more complete and fulfilled in this life, we must live accordingly, turning from all else to be focused on Christ.

“IF there is any encouragement in Christ, IF there is any solace in love, IF there is any participation in the Spirit, IF there is any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.” It’s that simple! We have been doing that here at St. Martin de Porres Parish for 58 years! Living and growing in the Holy Spirit and in faith!

Which of the two sons in today’s Gospel will we imitate: the son who says “Yes, I will help” but doesn’t? Or the son who says, “No, I won’t, I can’t” but later does what they are called to do? Doing what the Lord is asking us, calling us to do, is a wonderful, inspiring and good start to turning our attitudes around toward God. Jesus shows us in today’s Gospel passage how believers like you and me can cultivate our relationship with the Father. We learn that even if our initial response to God’s invitation is not what it should be -- “No, I won’t, I can’t!” -- we can change our minds and give in to God’s will for us. We also learn that a verbal “Yes, sir!” to God without a lived out follow-up is no response at all.

One way to think of obedience is in terms of “listening”; in fact, “to hear” is at the root of the word *obey*. What is more, repentance, one of the themes of this week’s readings, could be seen as a matter of obedience, of listening to -- and doing -- the ways of the Lord and the voice of the Church. Where do YOU do obedient listening? How do you act on it?

What sacrifices do YOU make for the good of your Christian community? How can you connect them to the Easter Mystery in which Christ “emptied himself”? What is your definition of humility? How do you practice humility?

We are being challenged to pursue not “what’s fair,” a holiness that is “just enough” but total conversion to the living God. This means that any [false presumption](#) that we have arrived, that we have ascended to the height of holiness through our virtuous deeds is a sign that we are still wounded.

We must have the [attitude of the tax collector or the prostitute](#), aware that redemption is a total gift. God is not playing a tit-for-tat game. You do good, then

you get some good things. Rather, God wants the sacrifice of the whole heart joyfully lifted up to him.

We do not go this road alone. St. Paul hands onto us a hymn that the Church sings in the Liturgy of the Hours every Saturday night. Jesus is the God-man, who does not claim equality with God. He is not operating out of fairness but total, self-giving love. It is this love that is divine.

It is the [self-emptying love](#) of Jesus Christ that can save us from our far too thin notion of fairness. Is it fair that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us? Is it fair that the one born without sin carried the sins of the world on his back? It's not fair. But it is love. And that's the currency of the kingdom of God.

This week begins the month of October, in our Catholic tradition, Respect Life Month. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced the theme for the upcoming Respect Life Month: "Live the Gospel of Life." Celebrated in October, the event is "a time to focus on God's precious gift of human life and our responsibility to care for, protect, and defend the lives of our brothers and sisters." The bishops chose the theme to honor the 25th anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical [Evangelium Vitae](#) ("The Gospel of Life"), which Archbishop Naumann, Chair of the Right to Life Committee of the USCCB, said "masterfully articulated defense of the right to life for children in their mothers' wombs, the elderly, persons with disabilities and the marginalized is more relevant today than ever before."

Today, let's mean what we say we believe. Let's really offer ourselves. Let's wish each other peace from the heart. Let's show it by how we live. Let's be responsible stewards and go out into the vineyard to do the work our heavenly Father asks of us. To paraphrase St. Anthony of Padua:

"May our words be few and may our actions speak for us." AMEN!