

**23rd. Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)**  
September 4, 2011 (Labour Day Sept. 5)

1) Love is the Source of Everything

1. "Owe no one anything except to love one another." God is reminding us today in the Second Reading that the one thing we owe each other is to love one another. All the commandments are summed up in the Great Commandment : "Love God and your neighbour as yourself"

2. Pope Benedict tells us in his latest pastoral letter, Charity (Love) in Truth: "Everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it." (2) God has created us and the whole universe for no other reason than out of love. God wants to share his love, for us to have his love and have us love him and each other in return.

God has made us to live in love together, in mutual care for one another.

3. However, as we know, sin has entered into our world and into our relations with one another. Often one group inflicts hurt on another group and instead of mutual care, there is struggle and antagonism as one group struggles to obtain the recognition of its rights from another group. Such has been the history of the relations between labour and capital, between owners and working people.

2) Labour Day

1. Labour Day which we celebrate tomorrow, was established to celebrate the struggle of workers for recognition of their dignity as human persons entitled to good wages and working conditions. It also celebrates all that workers have produced.

2. Through uniting together, working in solidarity, joining together in labour unions, workers have vastly improved conditions, not just for those in unions but for all workers. Labour unions have raised standards for wages and working conditions for all workers.

3. Through the 19<sup>th</sup>. century and much of the last century, workers struggled against exploitation by the owners of factories, mines, mills and other industries. Workers had no security. Many employers regarded them as a commodity to be obtained at the lowest cost or wage, like the materials of production.

The life of workers and their families was miserable. They suffered from pittance wages, extremely long working hours and unsafe places of work. Many factories were sweatshops; mines had inhuman working conditions.

4. Economic life was governed by a philosophy of "laissez-faire" individualism, which meant let the economy go whatever way it will through free competition, without restricting it by government regulations or the action of unions. Some of the same philosophy and practice is still with us today in some areas of government and business.

5. Labour Unions were looked upon as the enemies of trade and business. Workers who tried to form a union or go on strike were often arrested. Strikes and peaceful demonstrations were broken up by police or troops. Sometimes workers were killed.

6. Pope Leo the 13<sup>th</sup> championed the cause of workers with his pastoral letter on the condition of workers in 1891. He upheld the right of workers to form unions, to receive a living wage, and to have safe working conditions. Since then, the Church through our popes and bishops has continued to uphold the rights of workers. Pope Benedict continues on this path. In that latest pastoral letter, Love in Truth for Human Development, he stresses the priority of access to steady employment for everyone. Work is a fundamental human right.

### 3) Union Bashing

1. Today, labour unions are being attacked by some business groups, some State governments in the U.S. and by some journalists. Some of them blame our economic Recession on excessive demands by labour unions. The American government Inquiry Commission into the Financial Crisis concluded that the economic crisis was caused by failures in government regulation, corporate mismanagement and irresponsible risk-taking in the financial sector. The Commission concluded that the crisis was completely avoidable.
2. There are groups in Canada and the U.S. who want governments to curtail the rights of unions. They would be happy if unions were done away with and employers were free to set their own amounts for wages and their own arrangements for working conditions and hours of work.
3. Some want to do away with the “Union Shop” requirement between the union and management. This requires that all the workers in a company belong to its union and pay its dues. Some workers feel that this requirement infringes on their personal freedom, that they should be free to join a union or not. But if they accept employment in a company with its body of workers, they are benefiting from the wages and working conditions obtained by the union and should contribute to the union and be in solidarity with it.

### 4) Love and Solidarity

1. All relations and negotiations between unions and management should be governed by brotherly love and mutual respect and care. This may seem very unrealistic, seeing the many antagonisms that exist between these groups. But if both parties are to come to a harmonious relationship, love must direct this. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states: “No legislation, no system of rules or negotiation will ever succeed in persuading men and women to live in unity, brotherhood and peace; no line of reasoning will ever be able to surpass the appeal of love. Love is a force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today’s world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations, legal systems from within. It is an indispensable act of love to strive to organize and structure society so that one’s neighbour will not find himself in poverty.” (207,208)
2. Pope Benedict states in “Love in Truth”: “Love is the principle not only of relationships with friends, with family members or within small groups, but also of wide social, political and economic relationships.” (2)
3. A key expression of love of neighbour is the virtue and principle of solidarity. Pope John Paul stated: “God created us to live in solidarity. This means to live in union with one another, supporting one another, committed to the common good, the good of all and each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” (Social Concerns 38)  
One of the theme songs of labour unions is “Solidarity Forever.” Solidarity is required for unions and for all groups. It should begin in families, learned and experienced there as Pope John Paul describes it.
4. The Church teaches: “Labour unions, while pursuing their specific purpose with regard to the common good, are a positive influence for social order and solidarity, and therefore an indispensable element of social life.” (Comp. Soc. Doctr. 305)

### Transition to Eucharist

The Risen Jesus, present in the Mass, draws us into the saving power of  
his Death and Resurrection.

From him we receive the power of his Death to overcome all that is wrong,  
within us and around us in our world.

From him we receive the power of his Spirit for vigour and strength, love,  
understanding and direction to deal with our present social problems and suffering.

Let us offer ourselves and all we do in union with Jesus, as we share in his Saving Offering.