

Reflections on the Common Lectionary

These reflections may be useful to Labor Day speakers in Christian congregations that use the Common Lectionary readings. Most Roman Catholic and many Protestant churches use the Common Lectionary. Check with the Pastor.

These reflections are intended to link your personal reflections with the Common Lectionary. These reflections provide you with a framework, which you can change to suit your needs. You may choose to use some or all of the reflections provided. They are not intended to be a complete Labor Day reflection. **Remember to tell your own story, to use your own words, and to be yourself.**

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus' followers eat without following traditional procedures regarding the preparation and eating of food. When the Pharisees question Jesus about his disciples' defiance of these procedures, Jesus rejects their emphasis on law and tradition.

Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' He calls the Pharisees "hypocrites" and claims that they "abandon the commandment of God and hold fast to human tradition." Following traditions, without faith and without true commitment, is meaningless.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees warns all of us to resist complacency and not to limit ourselves to traditional religious activities. Sometimes people of faith are unwilling to engage in struggles for justice and peace because they consider such struggles beyond the scope of their worship activities. We must not allow ourselves to become "hypocrites," professing faith with our lips, but not in our lives. Jesus Christ calls us to do more.

General reflection:

Throughout the Bible, it is clear that our call is to transform the world into the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of justice, freedom, and peace. Labor Day gives us an opportunity to honor the work that is done by millions of American men and women. On Labor Day, we should consider the ways in which we—as individuals, as congregations, as Churches—can help to bring about this transformation, especially for low-wage workers in this country.

As a member of a union, I know from experience that unionization is one way to make our society more just. (*Depends who is giving the reflection.*) People join unions so that they have protection at their jobs and a way for their voices to be heard. Unions promote justice because they give individual workers a collective voice, which allows them to address concerns about safe working environments, living wages, decent benefits, and job security.

Historically, the labor movement has made American society more just. The union movement brought about many policies that we take for granted—the weekend, paid holidays, the eight-hour day, child labor laws, and Labor Day itself. Unions challenge the gross disparity of wages that is often present in today's corporations.

People of faith can help workers in many ways. We can pray for workers and their struggles during the worship service. We can ensure that all of our own workers are paid a living wage and provided with family health coverage. People of faith can participate in boycotts of hostile employers, attend rallies with striking workers, meet with employers to encourage them to settle fair contracts and lobby legislative bodies to pass legislation that will protect workers' rights and promote their well-being. People of faith can work together through Interfaith Committees on faith-based campaigns for worker justice.

People of faith are called to be doers, not hearers. Working together, organized labor and the Church can be a strong voice for the struggle for worker justice. AMEN.

—Reflections prepared by Teresa Mithen, Intern, Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues, Summer 2000. (Teresa studies public policy at the University of Chicago and is discerning a call to ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church.)

Readings for Sept. 4, 2000

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

James 1:17-27



**“Be doers of
the word, and
not merely
hearers who
deceive
themselves.”**

-James 1:22