
Justice in the Fields



A Seven-Day Devotional: Farm Workers and Catholic Social Teaching

National Farm Worker Ministry
(www.nfwm.org)

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A Brief Note

The National Farm Worker Ministry is based out of Raleigh, North Carolina. Specifically, the **National Farm Worker Ministry** is a faith-based organization, which supports farm workers as they organize for justice and empowerment. NFWM's ministry focuses on education and advocacy; to learn more, please visit www.nfwm.org.

Introduction

Welcome! Each devotional includes an opening prayer, a reading from Scripture, a daily reading on a social teaching, and a space for you to write down your thoughts. Feel free to adapt this devotional curriculum to your regular personal practices. We hope this resource helps you to think through the important relationship of farm worker rights and Catholic Social Teaching. Should you also like to read more, see the superscriptions (for example, "ii" on page 3), and their corresponding endnote.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Day 1, Life and Dignity of the Human Person.....	3
Day 2, Call to Family, Community & Participation.....	4
Day 3, Rights and Responsibilities.....	6
Day 4, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.....	8
Day 5, Dignity of the Work & the Right of Workers...	10
Day 6, Solidarity.....	11
Day 7, Care for God's Creation.....	13
End Notes.....	15-16

Day 1: Life and Dignity of the Human Person



"Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila"

"Christ has no body now, but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
With compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now, but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
With compassion on this world."ⁱ

Scripture Reading

Galatians 3:26-29

Daily Reading

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states, "We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person."ⁱⁱ Since every human person deserves dignity, we are called to respect his or her dignity. This is done as we care for the sick, to avoid war, challenge various social sins, and seek aid for individuals.

Farm workers, the people who grow and harvest most agricultural products in our country, are persons who deserve our dignity. Almost always stripped of human dignity, they are forced to work in dangerously hot conditions with few incentives. Likewise, many workers are not allowed to take water breaks and they work for many hours a day (without adequate pay or overtime). Farm workers do not receive human dignity in their working conditions or how they are compensated.

The Galatians reading conveys an unmistakable sense of equality. By breaking down the social boundaries, the Apostle Paul is encouraging Christians to name and respect the dignity of others. In understanding the plight of farm workers, this protection

of dignity begins in listening and promoting standards that treat them ethically and with dignity.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does my occupation offer me human dignity?
For what should I be thankful?
2. My faith and my tradition really cares for the dignity of all persons. How do I show that to others in advocacy and awareness?
3. As I continue to examine how Catholic Social Teaching relates to farm worker rights and issues, what do I hope to learn?
4. How is God molding my heart, intellect, and body towards farm worker advocacy?

Day 2: Call to Family, Community and Participation



"Nazareth Prayer for the Family" **By Mother Teresa**

"Heavenly Father,
You have given us the model of life in the Holy Family of Nazareth. Help us, O Loving Father, to make our family another Nazareth where love, peace and joy reign. May it be deeply contemplative, intensely eucharistic, revived with joy. May we love one another as God loves each one of us, more and more each day."ⁱⁱⁱ

Scripture Reading

Acts 2:43-47

Daily Reading

The second Social Teaching concerns family. Even persons who may be single, celibate, or other, can find family in the vast body of Christ. Since people are sacred and “social”^{iv} so must our faith care for families, the community and participation in our society (global, national, and local). Thus, we can all agree on the importance of caring for biological and community-created families. This importance is reinforced by the images of the early church in Acts (from the Scripture reading) show what this life is like. Pope Pius XII outlined, with the help of the Church, a vision for what healthy, faithful families look like. In his introductory prayer to these statements he asked God make many Catholic families like the “Holy Family of Nazareth.”^v He desired that all families could work together under the care of two loving parents.

Unfortunately, one of the major sub-issues in farm workers’ lives is child labor. Even though their parents work hard for them to live well, kids often need to work to help to provide for the family. Approximately half of a million persons working in the agricultural fields are under age 18. Since parents rarely make a net income of \$16,000, kids often have to join their parents in the fields to make any more money. Farm workers need

financial stability. Thus their kids often must work to help the family earn money. This means that their education is stifled, they are likely to encounter dangerous pesticides, and they can suffer or die due to sun-exposure. Children suffer the majority (70%) of all injuries related to mechanical failures or accidents.^{vi} Work, for farm worker’s families, takes a huge toll on their quality of living and who their children become.

Thus, we have a duty to respond on behalf of children in the fields. One way to do this is to continue to educate oneself on child labor laws and the complexity of children working to support their family.

Questions for Reflection

1. How are the lives of children directly tied to their parents’ socio-economic standing?
2. What benefits can children experience if they are attending a public school?
3. How is God molding my heart, intellect, and body towards advocating for farm workers and their children?

Day 3: Rights and Responsibilities



Prayer of St. Ignatius

"Dearest Jesus,
Teach me to be generous, To love and serve you as you deserve, To give and not to count the cost, To fight and not to heed the wounds, To toil and not to seek for rest, To labour and to look for no reward, Except that of knowing that I do your Holy Will."^{vii}

Scripture Reading

Proverbs 31:1-12

Daily Reading

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency."^{viii} This third social teaching, along with the Scripture reading, shows us the importance of providing a safe environment that which reasserts someone's natural dignity. The biblical text portrays an economically autonomous woman, who cares for both her household and also for the poor and needy (in verses 8 to 9). Interestingly, she is noticeably more just and giving than the kings referenced in verse 5. The literary woman described in Proverbs illustrates giving rights to the poor and having some of her own. By taking on an economic role, she becomes responsible for those under her household's direct and indirect (the poor and needy) concern.^{ix} Since she is praised for having great wisdom and living justly, the woman of Proverbs 31 is an example for Christians seeking to care for the rights and responsibilities for others.

When we discuss the rights of farm workers, we often think we know the solutions they will want: more job security, more money, and safety in our country. The problem is that often when we presume these needs we do not fully hear the voice of the farm worker.

Paulo Freire suggests that to advocate for a marginalized group, one must first fully engage them as people and to hear what they desire and need.^x When we hear the voices of farm workers, then we are able to join them in addressing their needs, and in seeking socially just policies in churches, in local bureaucracies, and at the federal level. And we are then able to join many others in the long walk for justice, which began years ago.^{xi}

Questions for Reflection

1. What rights do you think are very important to farm workers? Are they the same as yours?
2. How does giving someone what you think they need compare to taking time and resources to hear what they need? Do you have an example of this in your own life?
3. St. Ignatius asks God to teach him to be generous. In what spending habits do you think God may call you to be more generous?
4. How is God molding my heart, intellect, and body towards advocating for farm workers and their children?

Day 4: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



Prayer of St. Francis

"Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned."^{xii}

Scripture Reading

Luke 16:19-31

Daily Reading

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops believes that the poor must be attended to. The Bishops agreed, "A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first."^{xiii} The fourth justice teaching calls us to care for the poor and vulnerable around us. We need to be friends with the poor, and some of us may even choose to follow St. Francis' example of living in intentional poverty. The Catholic Worker Movement, spearheaded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, began with radical self-divestment.

However, when we think of farm workers, we need to drop the notion that the poor are choosing this lifestyle. Many farm workers make less than \$11,000 a year (dual-income families make about \$16,000),^{xiv} they are often only paid by piece-rate (how much they pick determines what they are paid). These piece-rates often keep pickers from making minimum wage. For example, in Florida, on an orange grove, a farm worker can pick "64 boxes of oranges (or 5,760 pounds of oranges!)"^{xv} in a day and only make \$6.81

an hour by the 85 cent piece-rate. The disparity becomes clear in knowing that the minimum wage in Florida is \$7.31 (in 2011).^{xvi} Farm workers wages' mean that they have little capital to use. When calculating how much it costs them to rent small shacks,^{xvii} and feed and clothe their families, little money (if any), is left for them to use.

The prayer of St. Francis and the uncomfortable biblical text of Luke 16:19-31 ask us to give to others and love them. For those of us who can afford much, we are expected to give greatly to the poor and those in need. With farm workers living in our same states, towns, and nation, we need to recognize them as our neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). They do not desire more handouts. Rather, they are awaiting justice and relationships across our socially constructed boundaries of socio-economics, nationalities, and race. We are reminded today to care for the good treatment of our neighbors; for inherent human rights.

Questions for Reflection

1. What about the story of Lazarus and the rich man makes you uncomfortable? Why?
2. How is God molding my heart, intellect, and body towards advocating for farm workers and their children?

Day 5: The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers



"Prayer to the Holy Spirit" By St. Augustine

"Breathe in me O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me O Holy Spirit, that my work, too may be holy. ... Strengthen me O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy."^{xviii}

Scripture Reading

Jeremiah 22:1-3

Daily Reading

Farm workers often find themselves alone or underrepresented in their line of work, especially if they are immigrants. Few farm workers have unions to provide legal support and organization to help them to gain representation with the corporations they work under. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states, "If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative."^{xix} History reveals that the unionization of farm workers has led to their acquisition of more rights and support.

Since Cesar Chavez began his work in unionizing farm workers in the 1960s, some conditions have improved. The NFWM and the UFW (United Farm Workers) organizations placed pressure on Guimarra, a grape picking company in California.^{xx} As a result of farm workers and others coming together to ask for a union, Guimarra allowed one to be created. By caring for the rights of the worker to unionize the plight of farm workers was bettered. These farm workers were finally heard and their requests were recognized.

Unions have given farm workers a legal platform to continue voicing their needs and desires with Guimarra.

Questions for Reflection

1. In reading Jeremiah 22:1-3, how do we understand God's justice? How is Jeremiah's sharp language able to communicate God's agenda so effectively?
2. What is the relationship between St. Augustine's prayer, the Daily Reading, and Jeremiah 22?
3. How is God molding my heart, intellect, and body towards advocating for farm workers and their children?

Day 6: Solidarity



"Prayer of the Farm Workers' Struggle" By Cesar Chavez

"Show me the suffering of the most miserable;
So I will know the people's plight...
Let the Spirit flourish and grow;
So that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice;
For they have given us life.
Help us love even those who hate us;
So we can change the world."^{xxi}

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Daily Reading

The imagery of this Scripture can be so metaphorical that we miss its transformational message. In our numbness to these words, we can assume that the Body of Christ is still separated, that we as individuals are meant to fend for ourselves except on Sunday mornings. But, as we consider solidarity and the Body of Christ, if we know someone is physically ill, we have the responsibility to care for them and to hear their needs. Likewise, if they are sick from their hard labors, we have a role in seeking better working conditions to prevent similar sickness.

Often, farm workers have heat-related illnesses such as nausea, dizziness, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, dehydration, and even death.^{xxii} When farm workers are dealing with pesticides, their children sometimes have serious birth defects. They themselves, often suffer from "Green Tobacco Sickness." Farm workers' bodies can be injured, maimed, or slowly weakened by frequent and dangerous labor.

As Christians, working in solidarity with farm workers, we are to work alongside of them to hear of their illnesses. This sixth social teaching concerns the well-being of the marginalized. In the context of the Scripture reading, their bodies are important. For if

these laborers are hurt and ill, then we are responsible to care for them, our neighbors (Mark 12:28-34). We ought to be reminded of these words from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace.

In our solidarity, we must hear out the concerns of the afflicted so that we can rally for institutional change.^{xxiii}

In NFWM's current campaign with RJ Reynolds, we are hearing of the sicknesses in the tobacco fields, the inadequate living conditions that affect health, etc. and we realize that we need to make those concerns known and to name them as unjust in front of the corporation. We must amplify the voices of farm workers, which is a main goal of the NFWM, so that corporations, legal institutions, and everyday Americans may hear their cries and desires – and respond.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are your experiences with unions? How does that influence your thought on this Social Teaching?
2. What are the needs of farm workers (others than those listed)? If you don't know, investigate some online resources to find out!
3. How is God molding my heart, intellect, and body towards advocating for farm workers and their children?

Day 7: Care for God's Creation



A Prayer for the Environmental Common Good

"As we breathe the very air which sustains us, We remember your love, God, which gives us life. Fill us with your compassion for Creation. Empty us of apathy, selfishness and fear, of all pessimism and hesitation. ... Move us into action to save our earth and build your sustainable Kingdom."^{xxiv}

Scripture Reading

Leviticus 25: 18-24, 39-43

Daily Reading

According to this final social teaching, "This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored."^{xxv} There is certainly some awareness that real environmental issues are afoot. Whether this is seen in melting glaciers or the rise of air pollution, there is a slow, yet relentless change occurring globally.^{xxvi} Truly, global, national, and local issues around climate change and the environment affect everyone; in particular, farm workers are impacted by it in a very visible way.

Farm workers, as mentioned many times in this devotional, feel the effects of pesticides first hand. As the NFWM has said before, "Pesticide exposure amongst farm workers is an issue of environmental injustice. It's one thing to worry about eating a piece of produce that's been sprayed with pesticides; farm workers are exposed to pesticides all day long, without the choice or ability to avoid exposure, and without a voice in the decisions about pesticide rules and regulations that directly affect the health of their bodies and families."^{xxvii} They are constantly put in dangerous conditions that can harm their body, just as they harm the environment.

The Scripture reading in Leviticus concerns the Year of Jubilee. The instructions attempt to help Israelites to give back to the poor and the debt slaves (many of whom appear to be immigrants). The text of Leviticus invites us into caring more greatly for the land. Leviticus 25 illustrates that the land and the people are intrinsically tied together. Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis argues that big picture issues in agriculture (including pesticides) that our society faces fly in direct opposition to the expectations of Leviticus 25.^{xxviii} Thus, taken another step forward, Christians ought to be more involved with the land, and those who till it. We have a responsibility to care better for the land, knowing that our existence is connected to others and to the land we share.

Ultimately, knowing this does not change the fate of our energy consumption, the melting glaciers, etc.,^{xxix} but it does give us a stronger imperative to care for farm workers and the land that they work on our behalf. Farm workers deserve to be protected from pesticides, just as we hope that environmentally harmful pesticides will not be needed, as they hurt the atmosphere.

Questions for Reflection

1. What environmental concerns do you have? How do they overlap with farm worker issues?
2. How do I incorporate environmental stewardship into the justice programs and movements that I research or support?
3. How is God molding my heart, intellect, and body towards advocating for farm workers and their children?

End Notes

ⁱ Teresa of Avila "Christ Has No Body." *Journey with Jesus: Poems and Prayers Website*. Accessed on January 17, 2015. http://www.journeywithjesus.net/PoemsAndPrayers/Teresa_Of_Avila_Christ_Has_No_Body.shtml.

ⁱⁱ "Life and Dignity of the Human Person." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Accessed on November 24, 2014. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/life-and-dignity-of-the-human-person.cfm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mother Teresa. "Nazareth Prayer for the Family." Accessed on November 31, 2014. <http://www.christian-miracles.com/motherteresasprayers.htm>.

^{iv} "Call to Family, Community, and Participation." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Accessed on November 24, 2014. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/call-to-family-community-and-participation.cfm>.

^v Pope Pius XII. "Prayer for Christian Families." *Catholic Tradition Website*. Accessed on November 24, 2014. <http://www.catholictradition.org/Papacy/piusxii-prayers5.htm#FAMIY>.

^{vi} For more information about child labor, see our website's section called "Children in the Fields," <http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/children-in-the-fields/>.

^{vii} "Prayer of St. Ignatius." *Catholic University of America*. Accessed on November 24, 2014. <http://service.cua.edu/longtermservice/prayersfordiscernment.cfm>.

^{viii} "Rights and Responsibilities." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Accessed on November 24, 2014. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/rights-and-responsibilities.cfm>.

^{ix} Meyers, Carol. "Was Ancient Israel Patriarchal?." Lecture at Duke Divinity School. October 8, 2014.

^x Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Edition). Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2005.

^{xi} Hoffman, Pat. *Ministry of the Dispossessed: Learning from the Farm Worker Movement*. Los Angeles, CA: Wallace Press, 1987.

^{xii} "The Peace Prayer." *The National Shrine of Saint Francis of Assisi Website*. Accessed on November 24, 2014. <http://www.shrinesf.org/franciscan-prayer.html>. Note that it is also generally referred to as "The Prayer of St. Francis."

^{xiii} "Option for the Poor and Vulnerable." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Accessed on January 30, 2014. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/option-for-the-poor-and-vulnerable.cfm>.

^{xiv} "United States: Farmworker Fact Sheet." *NC Farmworker Institute*. Accessed on November 24, 2014. <http://nfwm.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/06/us-farmworkers-eng.pdf>.

^{xv} "Additionally, it's possible for a farm worker being paid by piece rate to make less than the minimum wage. For instance, the piece rate for orange juice in Florida is 85 cents per 90-pound box of oranges. Average productivity for a worker is 8 boxes per hour, which means that during an 8-hour workday, a worker will produce 64 boxes of oranges (or 5,760 pounds of oranges!). According to the 85 cents piece rate, a worker would receive only \$6.80 an hour, which is significantly less than Florida's \$7.31 minimum wage (as of 2011)." To learn more, visit our website: <http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/low-wages/>.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Please see: <http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/housing/>.

^{xviii} Augustine. "Prayer to the Holy Spirit." *Villanova University: Mission and Ministry*. Accessed on November 24, 2014.

<http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/mission/campusministry/spirituality/resources/spirituality/restlesshearts/prayers.html>.

^{xix} "The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Accessed on December 1, 2014. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/the-dignity-of-work-and-the-rights-of-workers.cfm>.

^{xx} For more information on this campaign, see our "Campaign Packet" section of our website at: <http://nfwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/UFW-Campaign-Packet-9.29.14.pdf>.

^{xxi} Cesar E. Chavez, "Prayer of the Farm Worker's Struggle," Cesar E. Chavez Foundation, accessed on November 21, 2014, http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/ModelCurriculum/Teachers/Lessons/Resources/Documents/EXR1_Prayer_of_the_Farm_Workers_Struggle.pdf.

^{xxii} Our website has lots information on health issues faced by farm workers; please see this link for more information: <http://nfwf.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/health-safety/>.

^{xxiii} Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Edition). Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2005.

^{xxiv} Deren, Jane. "Prayer for the Environmental Community." *Center of Concern: Education for Justice*. Accessed on December 1, 2014. <https://educationforjustice.org/node/2860>. The Center of Concern is rendered under Catholic Social Teaching, trying to bring faith-based environmental change.

^{xxv} "The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Accessed on December 1, 2014. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/care-for-creation.cfm>.

^{xxvi} Nixon, Rob. "Slow Violence and Environmental Storytelling." *Nieman Storyboard*. Accessed on December 1, 2014. <http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/slow-violence-and-environmental-storytelling/>.

[environmental-storytelling/](http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/slow-violence-and-environmental-storytelling/). Nixon's work suggests that to spread environmentalism, we need to find better ways to tell the stories of death, decay, and violence, associated with related issues.

^{xxvii} <http://nfwf.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/health-safety/>.

^{xxviii} Davis, Ellen. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 80-100.

^{xxix} Brown, William. *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science and the Ecology of Wonder*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 240.