

May Day Message 2021

Ensure Right to Live with Dignity

“Right to Live with dignity cannot be denied to any One”

Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti

Let Us Rededicate Ourselves with Our Patron St. Joseph

Pope Francis has dedicated this year to St. Joseph, the Patron of workers. Let us thank the Lord for this great opportunity and rededicate ourselves in the spirit of our patron to dream and to work unceasingly for a new world order of ‘Social friendship and universal fraternity’. At this moment of great anxiety and distress let us place the whole humanity especially the workers – informal, unorganised and migrants, to the intercession of St. Joseph to journey with a Father’s Heart (Patris Corde).



Welcome, Protect, Promote and Integrate - Internally Displaced Persons

The right to live with dignity cannot be denied to anyone, Pope Francis affirms, and since rights have no boundaries, no one can remain excluded regardless of where they are born (Fratelli Tutti no.107). Hence as Pope Francis invites everyone through his World Day Message to the Migrants and Refugees in 2020, Let us, “Welcome, Protect, Promote and Integrate internally displaced persons”.

The Pandemic Covid 19 has exposed plethora of issues, the humanity especially the migrants underwent. Addressing the Kerala dialogue on 26 June 2020, the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen said, “Corona Virus kills indiscriminately” but preventing daily wagers from earning a living would result in people starving to death. A large segment of migrant population in our country experienced untold discrimination during the time of the lockdown. They were stigmatised and were labelled as carriers of corona. The migrants, intra-state, interstate, overseas- the seafarers, fishers, domestic workers, construction workers, nomads, footloose workers etc were put to immense miseries like no proper food, shelter, medicines and other essentials of life. They were put to unimaginable trauma and uncertainty.

According to the World Bank economist, Spriyo De, “The number of internal migrants in India was 450 million in 2011. As per the study of the UN rapporteur Philip Alston who published it in July 2020, there are over 250 million migrant workers in India who are at the risk of acute poverty. Though the country and states promised to provide everything to the distressed migrants, they remain as promises in the wilderness.

Millions of impoverished men, women and children in India migrate from the rural areas to the urban areas each year- in crowded trains, buses, trucks and sometimes on foot with their belongings bundled over their heads, in search of employment and means to survive. Many tend to drift quickly to low paid, vulnerable occupations- picking waste, pulling rickshaws, working in mines and brick kilns, constructing buildings and roads, or working in the private premises of the household. They are treated as intruders and illegitimate citizens and live-in makeshift shanties or on streets and in night shelters. Their wage rates are much below subsistence level and long work hours and unhealthy and unsafe conditions of employment. They are often unable to access even elementary citizenship rights like identity card, right to vote, ration card, health services and admission of children to schools. Their contribution to the GDP of the country is very large. Yet migrants tend to remain in the periphery of public policy. Laws in the country are inadequate to protect them. Even the recently passed labour codes do not adequately address the issues of millions of migrant workers who are the backbone of Indian economy. Lack of access to social security, welfare programmes and health benefits make them more distressed.

This is at this juncture, along with the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Workers Day Message, the Civil Society's commitment to ensure, "Safe and Healthy Working Conditions which are fundamental to decent work" stands relevant. The intervention of the civil society, doctors, nurses, health workers, paramedical staff, the security personnel, navigators, government officials and ministers need to be kept on record and 'a big Salute to all the Corona warriors'. But now as millions of migrants started moving back to their work places inspite of the second wave of corona virus, to meet dare needs of life, the responsibility of the civil society emerges vital. It is once again the call of the hour to stand united with the migrant workers to demand for adequate surety of worker identity, portability of entitlements, occupational safety, health and social security. This is also opportune moment to negotiate to ensure responsible mobility as designed and accepted by the UN member States through the Global Compact on Migration (GCM). Over and above, it is time to realise the 2030 UN agenda, 'Leave no one behind' and to facilitate Safe, Orderly, Regular and Responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well managed migration policies. (SDG. 10. 7)

While searching for a dignified life to the migrants, Pope Francis reminds us that migration is not the only means to promote livelihood and dignity. He says, "Unnecessary migration ought to be avoided;



this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development" (F.T. No. 129). As Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation has dreamt and advocated that, "the Soul of India lives in its villages" and hence, we need to revive and rebuild the rural economies. We need to equip and empower the farmers and rural manufacturers to generate rural employment. As part of the Post Covid - 19 reflection, it is strongly recommended by various experts that we need to reenergise rural economy that is

sustainable and eco-friendly. In the knowledge era Anil Kakodkar, former Chairman of the

Department of Atomic Energy, proposes the need of knowledge bridges to be built between cities and villages and the creation of an ecosystem which has been conceptualised as a “cillage” – a synergistic combination of city and village. Further he states that “bridging the knowledge gap between a city and a village would also bridge the income gap between the two” (Published in Indian Express, April 14, 2020.)

As Pope Francis once again puts it, the Pandemic Covid 19 invites us for a deeper introspection. Pope says, ‘The world is itself crying out in rebellion’ and further reminds us quoting poet Virgil, “tears of things”, the misfortunes of life and history. (F. T.34). And therefore, Pope invites us “to take a step forward towards a new style of life”. (F.T. 35) This is where the Farm laws passed by the Indian Parliament on 27th September 2020, which has created strong dissent among the farmers as they see them as anti-farmer, enslaving them to corporates require a relook. So too, the new Labour Codes instead of ensuring universal social security and protection to all workers, reduces the workers into mere wage slaves. Similarly, the draft ‘National Fisheries Policy 2019’ and the subsequent ‘Draft Blue Economy Policy for India’ raises concern over the life and livelihood of over 10 million fishers and over 170 million people who will be impacted by the marine and coastal environment. The proposed Policies raise grave question, in the circumstance when the global warming and climate change predictions highlight heavy erosion to the extent that cities like Mumbai and Cochin which are located sea fronts, would be submerged by 2050. Though the draft Blue Economy policy is framed in the pretext of SDG 14, it raises questions on the livelihood, marine and coastal environment, marine ecology and the very existence of our mother earth.

Another World is Possible

In the context of the Pandemic and the unceasingly continuing impact of the Corona Virus, unimaginably recurring climate disasters, a search for a new paradigm of development is essential. The discourse that another world is possible is vibrant among the labour associations, social engineers and climate activists. This is where a team of scientists appealed to the national governments to reverse the development parameters in the context of the impending disastrous natural calamities.

In his latest encyclical Pope Francis also invites for a better kind of politics which represents one of the most valuable forms of charity because it is placed at the service of common good and recognises the importance of people. A better politics is also one that protects work because Pope reiterates that ‘Since production systems may change, political systems must keep working to structure society in such a way that everyone has a chance to contribute his or her own talents and efforts. For “there is no poverty worse than that which takes away work and the dignity of work” (F. T 162)

Pope in the encyclical also states that, “It is imperative to have a proactive economic policy directed at “promoting an economy that favours productive diversity and business creativity and makes it possible for jobs to be created and not cut. (F.T. 168) Therefore Pope emphasises that, “in addition to recovering a sound political life that is not subject to dictates of finance, “we must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structure we need.”(F. T. 168)

Pope Francis further states that, “We need economics that gives to all access to the fruits of creation, to the basic needs of life: to land, lodging and Labour. We need a politics that can integrate and dialogue with the poor, the excluded and the vulnerable, that gives people a say in the decisions that impacts their lives. We need to slow down, take stock and design better ways of living together on this earth”. (Let Us Dream- The Path to a Better Future)

Way Forward

The year of St. Joseph, the Patron of workers is an occasion to rededicate ourselves to organise and empower informal, unorganised and migrant workers. The Governing Council, Workers India Federation, in a recent meeting proposed to apprise the regional Chairmen and directors of labour commissions to organise regional programmes to Commemorate the year of St. Joseph, our Patron. Meanwhile Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have initiated a joint process with different religious groups, Civil Society organisations and workers leaders to work out common matrix to engage together to address migrant workers issues. In Delhi too we had Joint meetings with Caritas India, MAIN (Jesuits), VIVAT India (SVD's), Don Bosco 4 Migrants (Salesians), Migrant Commission CCBI, CBCI Offices of Education and Culture, Women, Tribal Affairs and SC-BC initiated by the Labour Office, to develop a synergy. Such initiatives may be worked out in every region in collaboration with the above and other likeminded civil society organisations to mark the year of St. Joseph, Our Patron and to develop a synergy.

Let us all stand united with St. Joseph, the Patron of workers to dream for and create a post Covid, New World order.



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