

WORK HAS TO BE VALUED AS WE CELEBRATE WORKERS' DAY

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The first of May is a national, public holiday in many countries across the world; Malawi, the 'warm heart of Africa, is one of them. It is celebrated on every continent. However, this year, 2020, due to the Covid-19, it is celebrated at a low key with the emphasis on preventive measures on the disastrous virus! International Workers' Day, also known as 'Workers' Day', 'Labour Day' in some countries, and often referred to as 'May Day', is a celebration of labourers and the working classes which is promoted by the International Labour Movement which occurs every year on the first of May. It is an ancient European spring festival. The date was chosen by a pan-national organization of socialist and communist political parties to commemorate the Haymarket affair, which occurred in Chicago on May 04, 1886, whereby an unidentified person threw a bomb at the police, [who responded by opening fire on the workers, killing four of them.](#) The [1904 Sixth Conference of the Second International](#), called on "all Social Democratic Party organisations and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on the First of May for the legal establishment of the 8-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace". In the late 19th Century, trade union and labour movements grew right along with countless industries, prompting trade unionists to begin to choose various days to celebrate the people's labour.

After the end of Second World War, many countries, some of which were very poor and affected by the war, pulled up their socks and started to work very hard and valued their work. They were passionate for their labour, they were passionate for their nations. Some examples of the countries which went from rags to riches are Switzerland, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan.

Germans and Dutch were well known as hard working people; some of them do still have that spirit today. Work for them was as if it were in-built in their bodies or in their blood system. And work for them went hand in hand with time. In fact, some of our elders too, especially those who worked with some missionaries, had that spirit of commitment and zeal; and prayer was never neglected ('Ora et Labora'). The value of work was the value of time, and vice versa. Everything was regulated and calculated accordingly and systematically. It is for

this reason that their countries have recorded tremendous development in the last century especially after the Second World War. They believed and were convinced that a nation does not become strong economically if the citizens themselves are not hard working. Their living standard too has improved a lot within the last century. For them, nothing comes from heaven like manna in the desert in the time of Moses!

This spirit or attitude goes against the generalised saying or even attitude that, "In Africa (or Africans) time is not a problem; we have all the time ahead of us." And of course, this attitude affects the value of work; hence, the economy of the African nations too. More so, the living standard is very much affected. We may take it for granted, but there is some reality in it. With this attitude, therefore, we tend to be contented or satisfied with the consolation that, 'Things can be done later. I have all the time at hand or ahead of me.' The working creative power and its positive thinking is minimised or simply remains redundant. One is shocked to see some employed workers packed in government offices or parastatals such as education, health, managerial or administrative institutions (schools, colleges, clinics, dispensaries, hospitals, secretariats) doing nothing even in the early hours of the working day. Or they simply take time to chat or watch TV. Of recent, there is a new trend of workers spending more time in prayer especially if they are given a chance of having a Mosque or a Chapel in the premises of work. Are these workers trying to live the spirit of St. Benedict: "Ora et Labora?" I doubt!!! St. Benedict and the Benedictines as a whole were (and still) very principled. The spirit of prayer manifested itself in the work they were doing - high standard and high quality. However, the time of work was highly valued and respected just as the time of prayer was highly valued and respected.

Vigils and fasting are important for our spiritual growth, surely. But what sense does it make if we over value vigils and fasting to the extent of making us sleep in our offices during working hours? What kind of quality of production do we expect at the end of the day in such situation? At this juncture, we ought to note that as work for us becomes more or increasingly 'spiritual', in the developed as well as in the fast developing countries, work becomes

increasingly scientific. “Therefore there is a great demand for learned, skilful and efficient workers, who are called upon to work hard and with maximum efficiency” (J. Maurus, *How to Win Personal Efficiency*, p. 90). As we celebrate 'Workers' Day, this should be a reminder for us that, if we do not take serious action to reverse our attitude especially in some parts of Africa, we should not be surprised that poverty remains to be our portion and identity! Botswana, Rwanda and Tanzania are part of the currently fastest growing economies in Africa. Corruption, mismanagement of resources and laziness are not tolerated!

It is amazing to see that some people had laboured a lot to get employment. Yet soon after being employed the story changes in reverse. Instead of appreciating that employment by working hard, complain or lamentation that 'there is too much work on their desk' becomes their motto. Of course, this is not to down play or to try to entertain or support the employers who over work or exploit their workers. Not at all! This is condemnable and it is unacceptable. Hard work deserves good and fair wage.

Today, most of the solid, strong and durable cars are the Japanese made. Japan is one of the fast developing countries. The secret of the progress that Japan has made in a comparatively short time is qualitative work. “Whether on the street, the factory floor or in the executive bullpen, the Japanese is constantly exhibiting his conviction that will power and effort are superior to matter. The Japanese has a keen sense of shame and obligation, impelling him to extra-ordinary efforts to keep his commercial

promises. Bosses, book-keepers and factory hands can be found doing voluntary night work to meet a delivery date. The attention is always on the task rather than on the clock” (by John Jessup).

It is an appropriate time for us in developing countries to emulate the spirit of hard work. Here again we are not down-playing those who work very hard in the farms and factories – those our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters in their simplicity. However, we cannot raise our standard of living if laziness and wastage of time is at the core of it all. Government parastatals as well as religious institutions can only be strengthened and qualified if and only if individuals working in those sectors play their own role - working hard. Sustainable progress and development do not come from above but rather from below up-ward. No wonder, Kosuke Koyama, Japanese theologian, influenced and convinced by this reality, named his theological approach as “Theology from Below.” Whether we work in market places, shops, factories, offices, secular or religious institutions, if we do our own particular job to the best of our ability we get satisfaction out of it. But also the outcome of it becomes qualitative. 'It is important that we take personal responsibility for the way we live and work because one day we will be rewarded or judged for everything we do. If we own and value work, personal joy, growth and success will indeed be our portion. And it is evident that success in work increases when there is personal relation between oneself and the work and the rest of humanity since we are relational beings. Moreover, we know the purpose of work, the possibilities it offers, its redemptive power from economic viewpoint.