

Wage Theft Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B September 30, 2018 Nm 11:25-29; **Jas 5:1-6**; Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48 (In all manner of ways the poor are dependent on the good-will and pleasure of the rich and powerful, their employers.)

“Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.”

This is from the Letter of James. Now in the Book of Leviticus there is a law that forbids the withholding of wages of the day laborer past sundown. But in actual experience the poor, in spite of that law, have had very little leverage. **In all manner of ways the poor are dependent on the good-will and pleasure of the rich and powerful, their employers.** And in some cases in the history of our world there has been a very thin line between poverty and slavery. This is the situation James is decrying.

Both the Epistle of James and the gospel are warning us about the possibility that we might squander the great opportunities we have in life to actually make a contribution to the welfare and well-being of the creation itself, thus actually playing a role as a participant in the building of the kingdom of God, which of course Jesus is always inviting us to do. We are after all on earth for just so long. **We can make a contribution toward the well-being and the health of the whole of creation, or we can focus only on ourselves,** our well-being and our personal pleasures. The universal witness of the saints has been that **to live for others is to truly live, and to live only for oneself is to live a living death.**

Now we may conclude that these are just personal choices with just personal consequences, but that would be wrong. **They are personal choices with wide-ranging social consequences.** That is why **Christian people have always tried to influence their society for the better,** and it's always been an uphill struggle. Even hermits have withdrawn from ordinary social contact only to focus more intently on prayer and intercession for their world, for God's work to be

done. Of course there can be all kinds of controversies about how to proceed and what to do, but **inaction is not a conscientious choice.** Inaction is not an acceptable choice.

Now even in our own day the poor suffer the depredations of the powerful. Employers can and have stolen the wages that have been earned, and benefits. And the poor have no recourse or very little. A recent Department of Labor study estimates that just in two states, New York and California, wage theft has pushed over **fifteen thousand families below the level of poverty and one hundred thousand families into deeper poverty than they were before.** You yourself may be a victim of wage theft. One employer required employees to do chores after they had already clocked out. That is minor—true—but it is actually wage theft and it can add up.

Now there is a bill before Congress called the *Wage Theft Prevention and Wage Recovery Act*, which proposes to aid employees in recovering stolen wages and benefits and proposes to help deter unscrupulous businesses, which will be also a boon for honest businesses, because honest businesses are put at a disadvantage by these unscrupulous practices.

So if you are so inclined, you may stop by in the library after Mass and **send a postcard to your representatives in Congress** to support this bill before them.