“Brothers and sisters: Over all these things put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts” (Colossians 3:14-15). Today the Church celebrates the Feast of St Joseph the Worker. The Feast Day came into being in direct opposition to Communism’s May Day. In 1917, Communist Revolutionary Vladimir Lenin had grand visions of a world revolt of workers. “Prepare for an almighty battle, Comrade Workers. Stop the plants and factories on May 1st and take up arms…” As false dreams of grandeur diminished, May 1st turned into a typical holiday in an authoritarian country — with military parades and praises sung to the nation’s self-justified leaders. I Perhaps you remember, how the USSR took pride in showing off its military in a vain effort to keep the threat of world domination alive.

In 1937, Pope Pius XI invoked St Joseph’s protection against the communist threat:

- “This modern revolution… has actually broken out or threatens everywhere, and it exceeds in amplitude and violence anything yet experienced in the preceding persecutions launched against the Church. (2)\n
- To hasten the advent of that “peace of Christ in the kingdom” so ardently desired by all, We place the vast campaign of the Church against world Communism under the standard of St. Joseph, her mighty Protector. (81)

Pius XI issued Divini Redemptoris on the Feast of St Joseph (March 19) in the 16th year of his pontificate.

In 1955, his successor, Pope Pius XII, chose May 1st as the Feast of St Joseph the Worker. He feared the threat to human freedom under Communism which made efforts to suppress the Catholic church in the Soviet Union, the Eastern bloc, and in China. The Feast of Joseph the Worker opposed the “discord, hatred and violence with which Communists had marked the celebration of their May Day.”

In the beginning years of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, workers in Poland’s Gdansk Shipyards (formerly the Lenin Shipyards) demanded better working conditions and more just pay as they formed the independent labor union Solidarity. Solidarity gave rise to a broad, non-violent, anti-communist social movement that contributed greatly to the fall of Communism.

Soviet Communism fell and yet the Feast of St Joseph the worker remains. In silence, Saint Joseph continues to care for us, to watch over the Church, and to model for all the dignity of human work. In turn, we continue to remember and to pray. In closing, let me share with you a shortened version of Pope Pius XII’s prayer to Joseph the Worker:

- Saint Joseph, humble and just artisan of Nazareth, you give all Christians an example of a perfect life through diligent labor and admirable union with Jesus and Mary. Assist us in our daily work to see in it an effective means of glorifying God, of sanctifying ourselves, and of being a useful member in society.

- Obtain for us from the Lord humility and simplicity of heart, love for our work and kindness towards our fellow-laborers; conformity to God’s will in the unavoidable trials of this life together with joy in bearing them; recognition of our specific social mission and a sense of responsibility; the spirit and discipline and prayer; docility and respectfulness towards superiors; the spirit of brotherhood towards our equals; charity and indulgence with our dependents.

- Accompany us in times of prosperity that we may honestly enjoy the fruits of our labors; sustain us in our hours of sadness, when Heaven seems to be shut in our regard, and even the very tools with which our hands toil appear to rebel against us.

- May we keep our eyes fixed on our Mother, Mary, your dearest Spouse, who as she spun silently in a corner of your shop would discreetly smile. May we never take our eyes off Jesus, who learned from you you at the carpenters bench, in order that we may lead on earth a peaceful and a holy life, a prelude to the life of eternal happiness that awaits us in Heaven for ever and ever. Amen.

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