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Sec'y of Labor Marks Feast of St. Joseph the Worker

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

This year, the calendar kept us from celebrating the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. It fell on Divine Mercy Sunday, the day the Church beatified Pope John Paul II, which seemed fitting given the late pontiff's commitment to labor.

But, the Faith & Politics Institute nonetheless held its annual St. Joseph the Worker Breakfast at which Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis gave the following speech:

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis

May 5, 2011

The Faith & Politics Institute

St. Joseph's Breakfast

Thank you, Robert. For your work here at the Faith & Politics Institute and all of your efforts to promote democracy around the world.

Thank you, Rev. Farr. For 14 years, your organization has brought together important national leaders to celebrate the dignity of work.

The St. Joseph's breakfast is such a special event, because it unites political leaders, business leaders, faith leaders and labor leaders for a morning of insight and reflection.

I am so encouraged to see the labor movement unified and ready to fight together for economic justice.

Today, we remember 9/11 as a wake-up call to do more to protect our homeland.

We can never bring back the 3,000 Americans who lost their lives that day.

But after a 10-year manhunt, we can take solace in knowing that justice was finally done on Sunday.

Osama bin Laden will now answer to a higher power for his crimes ? thanks to the bravery of our Navy Seals and intelligence professionals.

In the Book of Romans, we are taught, ?Be not overcome of evil ? but overcome evil with good.?

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I recall this passage, because in America?s darkest hour, our first responders were our ray of light.

They didn?t blink in the face of danger. They risked everything to save their fellow citizens.

I was a freshman congresswoman on 9/11. I had served in the House for less than nine months.

But I?ll never forget how the Capitol police helped us feel safe.

As lawmakers, we were evacuated from the Capitol, but we couldn?t get home.

The streets were backed up. The Metro was closed down.

The Capitol police led us out to a lawn a couple of blocks from the Capitol. And they stood watch over us until it was safe to change locations.

Two days later, I remember touring the crash site at the Pentagon and the smell of burnt metal. That stays with you.

Walking alongside the debris, I thought about the courage of the firefighters who ran into that building to stop the flames.

As labor secretary, I am especially proud of the workers who rebuilt the Pentagon in record time.

More than 40 percent of the construction workers on-site were Latino.

Most of them were Salvadorian.

They set an amazing goal?to rebuild the Pentagon in less than a year!

They worked 20-hour days.

They pushed themselves to the limit, because they wanted to show the world, ?If you knock America down, we will get right back up.?

And on Sept. 11, 2002, the E-ring of the Pentagon was rebuilt and completely operational.

At the Labor Department, we are proud to host the Labor Hall of Fame.

In our Hall, we honor the 403 rescue workers who lost their lives at Ground Zero trying to save their

fellow citizens. They represent America's best.

As a public official, the sacrifices of our first responders are never far from my thoughts.

Most of America's first responders are state public employees.

In several states, governors have said the financial crisis means they can no longer afford to negotiate with public workers over wages, benefits and working conditions.

It's one thing to ask workers to make concessions to help close budget holes.

But it's another to balance budgets on the backs of those who risk their lives to keep their communities safe.

In Ohio, even police and firefighters have been stripped of important collective bargaining rights.

They lost the right to negotiate the number of officers and firefighters on duty at a given time.

I'm worried about this precedent. First responders need a voice at the table.

We must never forget that they made the ultimate sacrifice on 9/11.

And as we grapple with our fiscal challenges, we must remember that our first responders were there for us when we needed them the most.

Today, our first responders need us.

So we should stand with them to make sure they have the tools they need to do their jobs and provide for their families.

So thank you, Rev. Farr, for the invitation to be here today.

And thank you to James, Kenneth and all of our first responders for being your brother's keeper, and for doing the hard, dangerous work of keeping this country safe.

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