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Catholics need to join the picket lines

by John McCarthy

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There was a lot of media buzz surrounding the thousands of Wal-Mart employees who took to the picket lines on Black Friday. Despite these protests, big corporations were still able to record massive profits with little interruption.

It seems as though we've become a country that is outraged with CEOs lining their pockets but rarely flinch at the thought of the working poor. So often we assume that the people working low-wage jobs are lazy or uneducated -- we rarely think of them as our equals.

Now more than ever, we need to remember our church's call to stand with the individuals stuck in these dead-end jobs and remind the world of their dignity. This is our tradition as a church, and workers around the country need us. I hope these excerpts help you remember this long line of activism and push you towards offline advocacy!

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (USCCB, 2007)

"Catholic social teaching supports the right of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. ... Workers, owners, employers, and unions should work together to create decent jobs, build a more just economy, and advance the common good" (No. 76).

Centesimus Annus (Pope John Paul II, 1991)

"Furthermore, society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount for savings. This requires a continuous effort to improve workers' training and capability so that their work will be more skilled and productive, as well as careful

controls and adequate legislative measures to block shameful forms of exploitation, especially to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable workers, of immigrants and of those on the margins of society."

Economic Justice for All (USCCB, 1986)

"Perhaps the greatest challenge facing U.S. workers and unions today is that of developing a new vision of their role in the U.S. economy of the future. The labor movement in the United States stands at a crucial moment. The dynamism of the unions that led to their rapid growth in the middle decades of this century has been replaced by a decrease in the percentage of U.S. workers who are organized. American workers are under heavy pressures today that threaten their jobs ... In these difficult circumstances, guaranteeing the rights of U.S. workers calls for imaginative vision and creative new steps, not reactive or simply defensive strategies."

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