

*23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Labor Day Weekend*  
*September 6, 2020 – St. Patrick Church, Milford*

Our Labor Day national holiday was established in the 1880s for two reasons: to mark the irreplaceable role of the American worker in making this country prosperous and strong; and to have time to attend speeches and events on the spiritual and educational aspects of work, the worker and the good that comes from work. Labor Day remains an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the meaning of human work, and specifically our work, not only for the good of our country but also in God's divine plan.

In the first command in the Bible, the Lord gave the human person the mission to co-operate (work together) with him in bringing His work of creation to fulfillment: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish ... the birds ... and every living thing that moves on the earth". God, who worked for the "six days" of creation and whom Jesus says "is still working", made man and woman in his own image and likeness and called them to share in this work.

God deemed his creation of the first human beings "very good." Right from the beginning, before the 1<sup>st</sup> sin of Adam and Eve, the human person had received this mission, which shows not only the goodness of human work but how central it is for man's dignity, vocation and mission. After the Fall, both aspects of man's work became toilsome — procreation now would bring with it the "pangs of childbirth" for the woman and the work of subduing and having dominion would now bring "sweat" to one's brow — but work would remain fundamentally good, and in fact redemptive.

Work ... done well ... gives the human person the opportunity to cultivate all the various hidden talents and potentials God has implanted in him — physical, intellectual, and spiritual — which are far greater than those He has inscribed in the earth. So great was Jesus' appreciation for human work in God's divine plan that he could not stop using it as the proper analogy for his preaching. In his teaching, he favorably mentions shepherds, farmers, doctors, sowers, householders, servants, stewards, merchants, laborers, soldiers, cooks, tax collectors and scholars and many more. He compares the work of the apostolate to the manual work of harvesters and fishermen.

Jesus did not merely praise ordinary human work but shared in it. He spent the vast majority of his life in Nazareth as a manual laborer. His fellow Nazarenes knew him as a "carpenter". Following Joseph, his foster-father, Jesus entered into the world of human work, not as a "cover" until his "real work" would begin, but precisely to redeem noble human work in his process of redeeming the human person.

He called all his listeners, of whatever noble profession, to be saints. A few he called to leave their fishing boats or tax-charts behind to proclaim the Gospel. The vast majority he called to proclaim the Gospel by living that good news right where they were. That's still what Jesus does today.

Most of his followers are called to live out their discipleship and apostolate, their vocation and their mission, in the family and in the workplace. There they are called to become saints and bring others to sanctity through this "increasing and multiplying" and "subduing" and "dominion."

One's desk, or sewing machine, or kitchen, or chalkboard, or operating room, or workbench or boat, is meant to become an altar which sanctifies not only what is given to God in work, but the giver as well. It is there that the vast majority of men and women are called to be sanctified and sanctify others through showing the original dignity and meaning of human work.

Work is not principally about earning a paycheck, but about serving and loving others. When work takes on this meaning, the perfection of the human person continues, the work-place is evangelized, and God's work is advanced.

On this Labor Day weekend, a diligent construction worker from Nazareth waves to each of us with calloused hands and says, "Come, follow me!"