

*23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B-2021)*  
*Labor Day Sermon*  
*St. Patrick - Milford*

On Labor Day weekend, we pray  
that the Lord will bless the work of our hands.

In the 84-year-old Walt Disney movie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 7 short men invite Snow White into their everyday world with the words, “Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho. It’s off to work we go!” A song about work by those who do work invites us to look at the spirituality of work during this 2021 Labor Day Weekend.

There are many examples of a spirituality for work in the scriptures. The story of Peter fishing is a good example. Peter and his partners, James and John, have been working all night at their fishing profession. Their work provided money for housing and food—a livelihood for their families. Peter was an expert at his work. His father was an expert at the same work before him. James and John were experts at their work. After working all night at their trade, their expertise told them they need not lower their nets at Jesus’ request, but their spirituality of work did.

Jews at the time of Jesus believed that sometime after the dawn of creation, human beings were placed in the Garden of Eden, “to work it and take care of it”. What was likely an ideal work situation was disrupted when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the apple. At that moment, sin entered the world. Humans were expelled from the Garden of Paradise. From that time on, the dilemma humans found themselves to live these words as recorded in the Book of Genesis: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return”.

Many passages from the Hebrew Scriptures support work from the premise that work was necessary to prevent poverty and destitution. It was necessary to support a family and next to God family was the most important thing in the world.

When Peter was somehow inspired by Jesus to lower his nets for a catch of fish, we are given a new understanding of work. Work is no longer a source of punishment for the sin of Adam and Eve. It is not just something we must do to prevent poverty and destitution.

Work becomes an essential element of salvation. It will take work to build the kingdom of God. We do not build the Kingdom of God, a world of peace and gospel justice, for God. We build a world of peace and gospel justice with God for each other.

Through the centuries a spirituality of work can be found in our Christian tradition. The primary principle of this spirituality is that our work should not be done for the money it earns but for the human satisfaction it gives us. In her book *The Book of Divine Works*, Benedictine Abbess St. Hildegard of Bingen writes, “We were meant to consider all our deeds within our heart before carrying it out.”

In his 1956 speech in Montgomery, Alabama at the *Institute of Non-violence and Social Change*, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. urged that, “If a man is called to be a street-sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed, or Shakespeare wrote. He should sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will pause to say ‘Here lived a great street-sweeper who did his job well.’”

With a spirituality of work based on the principle that our work should be done not for the money it earns but for the satisfaction it brings us, all work, whether it is done by a powerful CEO, an inner-city housewife, a student in school, or an uneducated field hand, is the same because every person's work is the contribution of his or her God-given gifts to a divine enterprise. The value of all work is not to be judged by how much money it earns but by how it contributes to building the kingdom of God.

A spirituality of work immerses Us in the search for human community. We begin to see that everything we do, everything, has some effect on someone somewhere. We begin to see our life tied up in theirs. We begin to see that the starving starve because someone is not working hard enough to feed them. And so, we should. It becomes obvious, then, that the poor are poor because someone is not intent on the just distribution of goods of the earth. And so, we should be. We begin to realize that work is the lifelong process of personal sanctification that is satisfied only for the globe. We finally come to know that our work is God's work, unfinished by God because God meant it to be finished by us.