

# THE PASTOR'S CORNER

## LABOR DAY THOUGHTS

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**H**uman work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. Hence work is a duty: "If any one will not work, let him not eat." Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2427*)

As humankind was made by the Creator the steward of the earth at its dawning, the *work of Man* was one of the ways that the human person would realize the image and likeness of God in which he/she was made. (Procreation, the begetting of children, was the most important, the most perfect realization of the *Image Dei!*) It's hard to imagine but God's idea of work was more like play, providing the kind of satisfaction and joy that, say, the gardener enjoys when growing vegetables and fruits, trees and flowers, etc. Greater than the utility the avid gardener gains from sustenance or nutrition, shade, etc., she/he experiences awe and wonder and beauty at the work and fruit of their hands.

It was only from the first, Original Sin (*cf. Genesis, chapter 3:17-19*) that *work* became, if you pardon my indelicacy, "a four-letter word." "Cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (*Genesis, chapter 3:17-19*)

Were God's words a malediction or merely the expression of his distress at the fine mess his beloved creatures had gotten themselves into? (Apologies to Laurel & Hardy). I prefer the latter interpretation.

In what may be said to be the first pronouncement of our salvation (the *protoevangelium*), God suggests that the original good of work, inhering in the original good of Creation, would continue: "I will put enmity between you and the woman," He tells the serpent who enticed the first couple into sin, "and between your offspring and hers; she will strike at your head, while you strike at her heel." (*Genesis 3:15*). Henceforth, work would be restorative in character. The early Church Fathers understood this "curse" to be a prophecy of our redemption from sin, foretelling a new Eve who would overcome sin and death by giving birth to a Savior. Mary, the new Eve, is often depicted in statues crushing the head of the ancient serpent with her foot! Not merely a punishment to be borne on account of sin, work would become the means for the repair of Creation. It would be a way in which humankind could share in the redemption of its Savior:

*"By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ."* (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2427*)

As our nation and many others besides end the summer holidays and prepare to get busy with work once again, we recall on Labor Day the role of women and men in building a place of freedom and possibility, especially the sacrifices of those who labored in hardship, poverty, and even slavery. May we also thank our Creator for the gift of work in every walk of life that ennobles us and carries on His promise.