

[Readings: Genesis 1:26-2:3; Ps. 90; 1 Thess.4:1b, 2, 9-12; Matt. 6:31-34]

When you think about it, the first “Labor Day” happened at the time of this morning’s First Reading. God as Creator of the universe, “labored” for the symbolic six days of creation and then, the God “who neither rests nor sleeps” “rests” on the seventh symbolic day to admire His handiwork.

Again, we need to remember the importance of what is called, “biblical numerology.” The Sacred Writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, use special numbers to convey the importance of their subject matter. One signifies the One True God, and the unity that is found in the Holy Trinity. 2 signifies the Old and New Testaments, the union of a man and wife, the relationship between God and the human family, the two natures of Jesus Christ.

The Number 6 symbolizes man and human weakness, the evils of Satan and the manifestation of sin. Man was created on the sixth day. We are appointed 6 days to labor. Without God in our lives, we are “close, but no cigar.”

Seven is the number of completeness and perfection (both physical and spiritual). There are 7 days in a week and God's Sabbath is on the 7th day.

God sits back, looks at a job well done, and pronounces His best creation, the human person, “very, very good.”

Our Second Reading mentions how you and I participate in God’s creative work. Pope Francis outlines it specifically in his encyclical, “Laudato Sii – On Care for our Common Home.” St. Paul exhorts us to conduct ourselves properly with trusting faith, unflinching hope and with mutual charity. Jesus echoes this in today’s Gospel when He says “Do not worry.” This is easier said than done, when one is unemployed, underemployed, employed in deplorable working conditions, or unable to work because of disability.

When you think about it, who wants to work? Nobody in their right mind. Of course, plenty of people in our society will be working right through this holiday weekend so the rest of us can relax and tend to our barbeques. They make the sacrifice; we get the benefit. Work adds to our human dignity.

Most of us will go back to work eventually, never fear. Even retirees have tasks to perform that properly fall under the title of labor: yard work, laundry, housekeeping, volunteering, caring for family members. Even children have work to do. It's September, isn't it? That means back to school; let's hear a collective groan of sympathy for the kids. And a small cheer of freedom from the parents!

There's no escaping the many responsibilities that come with being alive. We have to see to basic hygiene every single day, like it or not. We have to maintain our health by moving our bodies and saying yes to non-processed food. We have to use and feed our minds, too: Start a list today of new books to read before the end of the year.

Why all this talk of work on Labor Day? Because work is good. The work we do to maintain ourselves, or for the sake of those we love, or to make a livelihood are all vital to what it means to be human. Daily, you and I produce something: maybe it's a meal, a clean-shaven face, or a 10-page report on the present economy. Maybe we bathe children -- or elders. We may teach, take an order, preach a decent homily, plant seeds, and pick vegetables. We give our time and attention to people who need it: family members, coworkers, sometimes strangers. We give our "living sacrifice of praise" to God -- yes, our prayer is considered a form of work. We work when we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." To live morally, walking in the laws and the path of God.

Our work -- whether paid or volunteer, inside or outside the home, part-time or full-time, a career or a job -- is sacred and worthy of attention and respect. How we labor every day matters, and how we are treated and treat others in our work is an essential concern of Christians. Don't lose the spirit of God's justice and mercy in your work as the Pharisees did. Remember Saint Paul's advice as you labor each day: "Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "It is only through labor and painful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage, that we move on to better things." This is true in work. This is true in life. This is true in our journey of faith. Lord, give success to the work of our hands. AMEN!