

Homily For Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Labor Day Weekend)

Title: Labor is Life

Theme: Labor is our means to participate in God's creation

Homilist: Deacon William Yoho

Reading I Sir 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

Responsorial Psalm Ps 68:4-5, 6-7, 10-11

Reading II Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a

Gospel Lk 14:1, 7-14

“Mom why are carrots orange?” “Because that is the way God made them.”
“OK” said Susie only half accepting her moms answer. “Mom why do we put onions in the pot roast, I don’t really like onions?” Suzie’s mom said patiently, “because your father and I do like them and you don’t have to eat them if you don’t like them honey.”
“Ok mom.” A split second later, Suzie asked, “Mom why do we cut the roast in half?”
Suzie’s mom became a little short and snapped back “because that is the way we have always done it!” In an attempt to sooth Suzie’s apparent bruised feelings she said to Suzie, “When I was your age and grandma showed me how to make a pot roast, she told me to cut it in half. I am not sure why we do it, let’s call her and ask.” So they called and grandma told them she was not sure why they cut the roast in half but that is the way her mom had showed her when she was a little girl. She said she would call her at the nursing home and ask her about it. She hung up with her and called Suzie’s great grand mother and said Suzie wanted to know why they cut their roast in half. The great grand mother began to laugh on the other end of the phone and said, “I cut my roast in half because my pan is to small to put the whole roast in one piece.”(pause / laughter I hope)

Sometimes we do things because that is the way we have always done them. And sometimes we think certain things because it is the way we have always thought about them. This may be the case with this Labor Day weekend. How do we think about Labor Day? What do we think about Labor Day? It might mean the Cleveland Air Show, for most it probably means a long weekend. It may mean the end of summer. To others still it means the beginning of a new school year. While all of these things are true, they are very different from the original meaning of the first Labor Day.

Labor Day had its origins in the Central Labor Union of New York City when they observed the first Labor Day holiday on Tuesday, September 5, 1882. It was a celebration of working people. Laboring men and women took the day off to march

through the city streets in parades and then gather in parks for picnics. It was moved two years later to the first Monday in September. The celebration spread quickly to virtually all industrial cities. It was first recognized by the city governments and then the states and finally in 1894, Congress made the day a legal holiday.

In 1956, the Post Office made the first Labor Day commemorative-stamp. It was quite a fitting image for that period of time. It showed the image of a large muscular man carrying a sledgehammer, a pick, a hoe, and an ax over his shoulder. His wife sat nearby showing a small child how to read. The words of the poet Carlyle in the lower left of the stamp announced, "Labor Is Life."

Labor is life! Labor is life. Labor is Life? LABOR? Is Life? Now most of us are saying to ourselves this author must have had too many glasses of brandy before he started writing this. Labor is life? I am going to ask you to suspend your disbelief for a few minutes. Going back to the cooking of the roast story. If we can be open to doing things a different way, maybe we can find a better way to do things. If we can stop thinking in the same ways we have always thought about things, we may find a better way. If we can stop thinking about work in the same ways we have always thought about work, we may find a better way.

Labor is life. Now there are many good reasons that we as Christians should work, but not just work, work hard, work good. First and foremost, we work to sustain ourselves. We must be good stewards of what God has blessed us with i.e. our bodies, our children and families and thus we must take care of them and provide for them. God has blessed us with them we must take care.

Secondly all authority is given by God and if our boss asks us to work hard we are to obey that legitimate authority.

Thirdly, it is a powerful way for us to share Christ with others. It is our witness to the world. We are all called to share Christ with a world that is so in need of our savior Jesus Christ. I think of the saying of St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel always and use words if necessary." We preach volumes when we do our part at work. When we are the "go to" guy or "go to" girl it adds credibility to our witness. To work hard is to demonstrate the living out of our Christian faith. In doing so we advance the kingdom mission. They need to see it in our walk not just our talk.

It is what we are called to do. In Ephesians 6:5-9 it says "Do all things as unto the Lord." When you laugh, do it as a gift from God. When you work, do it as if God asked you to do it. We can only respond this way if we have an attitude of gratitude. We can only have an attitude of gratitude if we have a humble spirit. This humble spirit is what Jesus spoke of in today's gospel. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." If we have a right understanding of the great mercy that God has shown us by forgiving us our sins by Christ's redemptive work on the cross, then out of this blooms a great sense of appreciation, love and humility. It is from this sense of humility that we are able to treat others with humility. In our response to this greatest love that was poured out over us we in turn seek to give back. We can give this response of love by doing everything as if God himself asked us to do it. Do all things as unto the Lord. Work as if God had said, (deep "God Voice") "William, do this work for me." "John, do this work for me." "Mary, do this work for me." Do all things as unto the Lord. When we work give it our all, give it our best, give it as if we are doing it for God himself.

Labor is life. I think there would be a lot more north and south (heads moving up and down, agreement) if Carlyle had said Life is Labor. But that is not what he said. He said Labor is life. But the more I think about it, I think he might have been onto something. We are created in the likeness and image of God. He created the universe. And all that is in it. He has created it good. He has created us. He has gifted us with talents and abilities. We are part of his plan of creation. We are participants in his plan of creation. When we use our gifts we are participating in his plan of creation. We all are gifted. We all are called to share in those gifts. Admittedly it is easier to see man's participation in God's awesome creation in some particular types of labor, such as artist. It is not difficult to look at Leonardo DaVinci's David and see an active participant in God's creativity. But this is no less true of the baker, candle stick maker or any of us. If we are willing to suspend disbelief and not do things the way we have always done them, then maybe this Labor Day weekend we can look at this holiday in a new way. And if we can suspend belief and not think about things in the way we have always thought of them,

then we think about work in a new way and see it as participating in Gods creation. Then and only then we can see Carlyle was right Labor is Life.

Thoughts to ponder:

What work has God gifted me for?

What is my attitude about my work?

Am I willing to suspend disbelief and look at things in a new way?

Am I willing to look past “Because that is the way we have always done it” and try a new way?

Do I recognize God’s presence in my work or work place?

Do I consider my work holy or sacred?

How can I live my faith better at work?

Do I live out the gospel values at work?

Submitted by Rev. Mr. William Yoho