

Another Summer's End ... Lord Bless the Work of Our Hands!

Every year, we observe Labor Day. So, *speaking of faith*, we should pause to reflect upon the value of human labor and recall its essential role in the vocation and destiny of human beings.

In the first pages of the Bible, we read: "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*" This is the central truth we must keep in mind about human being, about ourselves; we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Men and women are the only members of creation who share God's image and likeness – are the only ones who can truly be said to be capable of work in its proper sense.

We are also given a command by God, a task we must fulfill. As the Book of Genesis put it: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth." By being given dominion over creation, and the command to subdue it, we are commanded to work.

The words of creation ... are also in a sense the first 'gospel of work'. For it shows what the dignity of work consists of teaching that we ought to imitate God, our Creator, in working, because we alone have the unique characteristic of likeness to God.

We see in the life of Jesus, God made flesh, an example of the value God ascribes to human work. Jesus did not despise work in his earthly life. He was the son of a carpenter and surely as a young man worked in his foster-father's shop. Because he took on flesh and became one of us, Jesus has an appreciation for human work, and so one can say that "He looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father".

Our work, then, is a vehicle through which we are made holy. How many of us approach work with that attitude? We are called to perceive work in this manner; we are called to be transformed and made holy by working.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, a curse was put on work because of their transgression. From then on, people would not just work, but they would 'toil'. Work, after the fall, has an element of hardship attached to it. Everyone here, I am sure, could easily recount the hard aspects of their work. How is the Christian to respond to this? By carrying the cross of the hardships in our job we can unite ourselves to Jesus on the cross. The key to being a successful person is to see work as a participation in the likeness of God, to give work its true meaning. It is when we can see our work as an encounter with God, a way of faithfully living out our vocation as men and women, being an instrument of sanctity that we begin to be transformed into the image and likeness of God. Work should sanctify us, not destroy us.