

WORK, A BLESSING OR A CURSE

This Monday is a national holiday, Labor Day. The concept for this holiday was proposed by Peter J McGuire, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. The idea was to have a day to celebrate the great contribution of the American worker to the health, wealth and growth of our nation. The idea was accepted and became a national holiday on June 28, 1894. Actually this is a very Christian and Catholic concept which involves a very basic idea of where work fits into the whole plan of creation. It is precisely here where so many misunderstandings occur among all Christians, among all peoples.

All too many Christians believe that work is a punishment of God on all believers because of the sin of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree of good and evil which was in the middle of the Garden of Eden, the paradise given to Adam and Eve to live in and take care of. God had given Adam and Eve a very clear mandate not to eat the fruit of a certain important tree; if they did so, then they would die and could no longer live in the paradise given to them. Recall how the book of Genesis describes how God, when he came to visit Adam and Eve that afternoon, he found them hiding because they realized that they were totally naked. Immediately God knew that they had eaten of the forbidden fruit. The fact that they suddenly realized they were naked is the scripture's way of saying that they had lost the gift of integrity, the gift that gave them total control of all their passions. God then told them that now they would die, losing the gift of immortality. And then finally, God told them that they could no longer live in the Garden of Eden. They lost the deep friendship of God. All this because they had deliberately and knowingly disobeyed God. No doubt Adam and Eve were very, very repentant, but since they were human and God was infinite, there was no way they could make up in justice the wrong of their sin.

But there is something else almost hidden and often overlooked in this story that God said to Adam: "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you as you eat of the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground from which you were taken; for you are dirt and to dirt you shall return."

Note that Adam and Eve were still to work but now it would be all the more difficult and hard. Therefore, work itself is not a punishment! Man was created to work! This concept implies something wonderful and exciting for all human beings, something few realize. In the book of Genesis again, we read before the fall that God said to Adam and Eve: "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." In another place in this story God has Adam name all the living things on earth. Here one must understand that the ancients believed that if one knew the name of someone (or something) outside of himself, then he had some control of that being or entity. To get an idea of what this means, if you were to call a person by name who was standing some distance away, they would instinctively turn to face you. In a very broad sense, you controlled them for a moment. Therefore, the scripture is saying that God gave Adam and Eve control of everything on earth, living or non-living. Putting all this together it becomes obvious

that God had great plans for Adam and Eve and all their posterity. They were to be partners with Him in the work of creation. God has given every single human being, starting with Adam and Eve, talents and abilities, more than any individual can develop in a lifetime. It is therefore the individual person who chooses not just which abilities or talents to develop, but also just how far they want to go and then just what or how they plan to use the results. God leaves all this up to a person to decide. The result is then that the person makes his mark on the whole of creation. For some, very few, it will be something which will have an effect throughout the world, while for others, the vast majority, it will have some effect in their immediate environment. In either case, the individual has fulfilled their mission in carrying out the ultimate plan of God the creator. They have shown that they have made a place for themselves in the history of mankind. This may sound quite pompous, but the amazing point is that no matter who one is, no matter what their standing in society, no matter how well known or unknown they may be, in God's plan, if they have fulfilled their mission in life as best they could, they have shown that they are vital to the whole of creation. Only in the next life will one see just how vital they really were.

All this may sound somewhat quite unbelievable. Perhaps the best way to understand this is to picture for a moment a giant picture puzzle with a zillion individual pieces. Suppose also that the picture has focused at its center a vast multitude of people, some obviously important by the looks of their clothes, others quite ordinary. Around the periphery of the picture is the scene of some local place on earth filled with a multitude of living things of all kinds. There is a patch of blue sky with one or two lazy white clouds. The completed puzzle is gigantic, huge beyond belief. Now if a piece is missing in the center of the puzzle and this piece shows the face of some individual in the crowd, one will then never know anything about that one individual. But if a piece of the clear sky is missing in the upper right corner, it makes little difference since one knows that it is simply a piece showing blue sky.

All well and good! But when the puzzle is finished and there is one piece missing, and it happens to be a piece of blue sky, just try and take your eye off the hole left by that missing piece. The whole picture, with only that one piece gone, is simply not complete! And anyone looking at it just wants to cut out a piece to fit and paint it blue. That missing piece, seemingly totally unimportant in itself, somehow destroys the integrity of the whole picture by simply not being there.

The remarkable point of this story is that most people in reality and in their own perception are not important to world history or events which shape and continue to shape the world. They are simply ordinary people trying to live happy lives, to fit in where they can, to avoid wrongdoing and simply care little for other climes or other places. Yet such "nobodies" as most would classify them and which they would agree they are, they still are vital to the entire picture, to the entire history of the world or universe, to the whole divine plan of creation which God has so carefully brought into existence. Unbelievable but absolutely true.

So on this Labor Day weekend, reflect a little on just how important you really are, not in the eyes of others but in the eyes of God your creator. He has made it part of his plan that he truly needs "you", as insignificant as you may be. Look at yourself and realize you are very much a somebody! Wanted and loved by God! Worth God dying for them!

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