

BULLETIN – SEPTEMBER 6

Labor Day weekend. How could it be here already? Last weekend was Memorial Day, wasn't it? The Fourth of July was sometime two or three years ago. However you come down on the climate change issue, all I know is that winter is getting to be ten or eleven months long, and summer was on a Thursday for the fourth year in a row.

But Labor Day it is, and that means the annual start-of-season activities are up and running again: school, night classes, meetings, RCIA, all the things that mean a non-liturgical "ordinary time." And we start it all by taking a day off to honor what it is that we do: work, labor. That's really not a bad idea.

James Cardinal Gibbons (1834-1921), longtime (44 years) Archbishop of Baltimore, was known as a great champion of labor. He once stated, "It is not the work that dignifies the man, but the man who dignifies the work." By that he meant that any gainful employment, any occupation nobly undertaken to support oneself and one's family, was made noble by a noble man or woman worker. From owners and general managers to players and coaches to the concessions vendors hawking food and beverages in the stands to the parking lot attendants, everyone associated with "The Team" has a role in presenting a good product to the public – in the case of a sports team, a healthy and enjoyable recreation experience. Many of us might not consider that to be "work," but it is employment, and it supports families – lots of them. Many complain about the over-the-top salaries paid to big-league professionals for their seasonal attempts at both championships and personal stats; but the fact is, many players are among the most generous millionaires in the country, pouring huge amounts of their wealth into foundations, trusts, and charities. And much of that charity goes unseen and unsung. That's true of people in many other professions as well. For all the "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" pomp and glamor, many people of means have discovered that they can consume only so much before their wealth winds up consuming *them*, and the only way to be really blessed is to become a blessing.

Each of us can do that, no matter what our calling or our income. One of Cardinal Gibbons' finest deeds was one of which he no doubt was totally unaware. A wealthy man down in North Carolina recalled how it was that he had become a Catholic and raised a big family in the Catholic Church in a state where Catholics were few and far between. He recalled that his family, staunch Presbyterians, used to take a ritual stroll every Sunday after church in his native Baltimore. Every Sunday, they encountered a gentleman in a long black coat and black top hat, also out for a walk but in the opposite direction. Every Sunday, without fail, the man would tip his hat to the family, smile, and say, "Good afternoon!" And every Sunday, without fail, the members of the family would turn their faces away and remain silent. One Sunday, the boy asked his father, "Who is that man, Pop, and why don't we answer him?" The father replied sternly, "That, son, is the Catholic archbishop. We have nothing to do with him, and you are not to respond."



As the years passed, the young man went on to college and began what became a very successful career. Through it all, he never forgot the man in the overcoat and top hat. Why had he continued to be so unfailingly pleasant when his greetings were clearly

not returned? One day in the university library, the young man came across a copy of the 1876 book *Faith of Our Fathers* by, you guessed it, James Cardinal Gibbons! He borrowed it, and began to read. And suddenly he understood what had motivated the man, who, though of slight build and less than average height, had been a giant in simple Christian thoughtfulness. And the young man took instructions and joined the Church, becoming responsible for setting a wonderful example of Catholic faith and behavior for generations of descendants – all of whom heard many times of the unknowing influence of James Cardinal Gibbons on their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

As Jesus told the lawyer after telling the story of the Good Samaritan, “Go thou and do likewise” (Luke 10:37)! At your work, whether it’s as a student, a breadwinner, a homemaker, a part-timer at two or three places, or any occupation in between, exercise that simple Christian kindness toward your fellow employees, fellow students, managers, customers, clients, or passers-by. Don’t worry that it’s not returned. There’s more than enough harshness, rudeness, judgment, and haughtiness in the world. You and I are here to make a difference, in the name of Jesus. And we don’t have to wait till our ship comes in or till we get a better position or till we have enough money to be able to do some good with it. If you don’t start now being the person you say you’re going to be when your dreams come true, you’re just going to be a nightmare for everybody else.

And when it comes to your attitude toward work, keep this simple point from Scripture in mind. Too many people consider work to be a punishment for original sin. Adam and Eve screwed up in the Garden of Paradise, and God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:17-19). There we are, see? We are condemned to the miserable existence of work because of our sins! Or are we?

Check out the preceding chapter, before the Fall: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15)! Whoa! So work, our stewardship of the earth, was not the result of condemnation! No, before we sinned, we were already partners with God in caring for his creation. Only when sin entered the world did work become hard and distasteful and unsatisfying. When you go to someone’s beautiful home, you often see and are enchanted by their garden before you enter the house. So it was with the Garden of Eden or Paradise. It was intended as a preface, an entry to the endless joys of the Home which we would ultimately enter. When we ate our way out of the Garden, our Eternal Home itself became all that much more distant and unapproachable. Christ has healed all that by his redemptive work. When we are baptized, our journey to our true Home begins, along with the restored power to enjoy even the most difficult and dirty jobs and to do them well, for the glory of God and the service of our neighbor.

Now, get back to work!! ☺))).

Do you know someone who’s interested in learning more about the Catholic Church? Our adult and youth religious education sessions begin again in just a couple of weeks, and are conducted on Sunday mornings after the 9:30 Mass. Be a good apostle and call the parish office at 454-6000 for information that you can pass on. Better yet,

invite your friend or relative and accompany them to the instructions. You'll be glad you did. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “In Jesus Christ, there is no distance or separation between the medium and the message. It's the one case where we can say that the medium and the message are fully one and the same” (Herbert Marshall McLuhan, 1911-80, Canadian philosopher of communication theory, public intellectual, professor of English, and devout Catholic convert).