

## Labor Day



Labor Day is a national holiday celebrated on the first Monday in September. *Wikipedia* reminds us that it honors the American labor movement and the contributions that workers have made to the strength, prosperity, laws and well-being of our country. It closes the Labor Day Weekend celebrations, and is considered the unofficial end of summer.

It also falls during my birth week. And, as a parochial school student, every year I got a new nun for my birthday. After enduring that, my parents enrolled me in a Jesuit College Preparatory Academy. Needless to say I did not appreciate the benefits of parochial domination and intimidation until after I graduated from a Jesuit University. And it wasn't until much later in my life that I realized that this formation was really my *vocation* at the time.

There are three words that are sometimes misused interchangeably. They are: "vocation," "career," and "job." The word "*vocation*" comes from the Latin verb *vocare*, to call or to summon. It is often associated with an answer to a *voice* – and is usually something you have to listen for. A "Vocation" then is literally a "calling." It refers to the work that one does because of a feeling of deep affinity, attraction, or talent. In best case scenarios, our professions and vocations overlap. There is even the notion that the best meaning of "vocation" is work that calls us to connect our God-given gifts and passions with God's activity in the world.

A great example of this connection is found in the life of the Little Flower, St. Theresa of Lisieux. She consciously tried to find joy and

express love in the simplest of activities. In her *Story Of A Soul*, she wrote:

I applied myself above all to practice quite hidden little acts of virtue; thus I liked to fold the mantles forgotten by the Sisters, and sought a thousand opportunities of rendering them service.

In the Luke's account of *The Boy Jesus At The Temple*, we meet the young Messiah during an early stage of his formation. He had just spent the last three days discussing scriptures and other matters with a very impressed audience of priests, scribes and other teachers. In typical adolescent fashion, he didn't grasp why his frantic parents didn't know that he was just answering His father's call to do His work. After the expected parental admonition, we hear that he went home, became obedient and grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. When his formation was completed, he left his job as a carpenter to pursue his vocation as preacher, healer, and Messiah.

A recent reflection in the *Word Among Us* offers something more mundane. A brick layer may perform a single task over and over again and again. Repeatedly placing one stone on top of another can get monotonous over time. It's easy for him to miss the importance of his work until he steps back to view the project taking shape. Similarly, it's easy for us to forget that every little action of ours matters to our Lord.

Sometimes, though, our everyday work doesn't feel quite that impressive. In fact, sometimes it just feels oppressive. That's when we need to remember that Jesus is with us. He took ordinary bread and wine and did the extraordinary by turning them into his Body and Blood. Our challenge is to take our ordinary work and transform it. In his hands, our day job, our daily grind can become a divinely ordained way for us to cultivate our talents. It is through our own labors that we may be able to join God in building a just and peaceful society on earth. In this way, we can become co-creators of the God's Kingdom on Earth.

Isn't that worth more than a weekend of beer, burgers and apple pie?