

Labor Day ~ September 5, 2011
Homily: For the Blessing of Human Labor

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St. John the Evangelist &
Blessed Sacrament

When Deacon Dan and Paul Schlegelmilch were in Spain last month for World Youth Day, they decided to go to Mass in a small town. Even though neither understood Spanish, they managed to stand, kneel, and sit when the rest of the congregation did so it wouldn't be obvious that they were tourists. At one point the priest spoke and the man sitting next to them stood up, so they got up too. The entire congregation broke into hearty laughter. After the service, they approached the priest who spoke English and asked him what had been so funny. The priest said that he announced a birth in the parish and asked the father to stand up.

Three buildings in town were overrun by squirrels—city hall, the hardware store and the church. The city hall brought in some cats. But after they tore up all the files, the mayor got rid of the predators and soon the squirrels were back.

The hardware store humanely trapped the squirrels and set them free outside town, but three days later the squirrels climbed back in.

Only the church came up with an effective solution. Father Carl baptized the squirrels and made them members. Now we see them only on Christmas and Easter.

As we gather together to offer this Mass to ask God's blessing on human labor, right from the beginning we need to recognize that work is a gift from God. Just like when God created the world and everything and everyone in it, God the Creator looked at what he created and said, "*It is Good!*"

All honorable work is deserving of respect. A significant and often overlooked way that we serve God is in our everyday tasks. The domestic engineer who sweeps her kitchen is accomplishing the work of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps, but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty, not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship. All honorable work is Godly work. Even the most mundane jobs become an extension of God the all-holy Creator, especially when done as a service for God.

Like last year, this year has been an extremely difficult one. Many millions are jobless or have a family member who is among 40 million unemployed or the additional 21 million workers who are underemployed. Unemployment remains at an all time high.

The picture gets much bleaker when we consider additional problems like child poverty, student loan debt, income inequality, unsustainable deficits, and a growing national debt that will burden our children for decades to come.

Something has to give. It is not greed or envy or finger pointing. But it is all of us coming together looking for common ground and seeking the common good that will change the course of events.

People need work to not only pay bills, put food on the table, and stay in their homes, but also to express their human dignity and enrich and strengthen the larger community.

We don't have time today to go into what needs to be done in order for this situation to be turned around. If you have an opportunity, I encourage you to read the Labor Day statement from the U.S. Bishops calling for a greater unity among all parties in working together for the common good.

In closing I would like you to consider the following observations—

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, be grateful.
Millions won't survive the week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle,
the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or
the pangs of starvation, be grateful.
Over 20 million people around the world are currently
experiencing these.

If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment,
arrest, torture or death, be grateful.
Almost three billion people in the world do not
have this freedom.

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back,
a roof over your head and a place to sleep, money in the
bank, in your wallet, or some spare change in a dish someplace,
you are among the top eight percent of the world's wealthy.
Be grateful.

If you can hold someone's hand, hug them, or even touch them
on the shoulder, thank God—
because you are able to offer God's healing touch.


If you hold up your head with a smile on your face,
praise God.

If you have a reason to get out of bed in the mornings or have
any kind of work to do,
consider this a blessing.

All you people of the land," says the Lord, "work, for I am with you."

Thanks be to God.

St. John the Evangelist
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