

Saturday, Sunday  
September 1 & 2, 2007

Labor Day Weekend

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

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I invite you to join me in prayer...

Heavenly Father, on this weekend that celebrates all who labor and toil in this world, let us not forget that we labor not only for ourselves, but for the common good of all. And as we strive in our labors for peace and happiness, we ought to remember that true peace and happiness lies with you. Now, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts always be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and redeemer. Amen.

I thoroughly enjoy reading the humorous things kids say. I guess it is a throw-back to my days in the teaching profession. Kids do say the funniest things at times.

For instance – and you may have heard these before:

“Dear God, I bet it’s very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it.” – Nancy

“Dear God, maybe Cain and Able wouldn’t kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works out okay with me and my brother.” - Larry

“Dear God, is Fr. Ward a friend of yours, or do you just know him through the business?” (That was edited somewhat...)

This is Labor Day weekend - a weekend dedicated to the social and economic achievements of the American worker. This weekend is

also a signature weekend for it marks the traditional end of summer and the beginning of the academic year for our schools.

From the collect for Labor Day found on page 261 of the prayer book, we pray: *Almighty God, you have linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all other lives: So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it for not self alone, but for the common good...*"

What is significant in this prayer is that what we do for our livelihood is not just for ourselves, not just for our families, but what we do affects all other lives for the common good, for the benefit of everyone. However, this is not the common perception or understanding of what having a job means. Ask anyone why they are working and most likely the response will be focused on making money to provide for life sustaining needs and the accrument of material possessions. Is there any thought given about how our livelihood benefits all others for the common good enters into this equation? Not usually.

Then there are those who will bring up the Declaration of Independence and the part which states that we have a right to life, liberty, and *the pursuit of happiness*. Christopher Gardner in his article, "The Pursuit of Happiness" stated, "I remember thinking / how did he (Thomas Jefferson) know to put the pursuit part in there? That maybe... happiness is something that we can only pursue and maybe we can actually never have it. No matter what."

I appreciate Gardner's thoughts about the pursuit of happiness, but have reservations about agreement with him that we can never achieve it – no matter what. The critical element for me is to where are we looking for our happiness; what is the road taken in the pursuit of happiness?

This weekend marks major events in the sports world: football gears up for another season and baseball heads for the playoffs. Is it true that the favorite baseball team for Fr. Commins is the Clerical Errors Black Sox? Actually, his favorite team is... the New York Mets.

Has anyone ever heard of Josh Hamilton, a pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds? Hands?... Now before you believe that Fr. Molison is really up on his baseball, I need to tell you I did not know Josh Hamilton even existed until my daughter, Krista, who at the request of my grandson, Andy, placed on my desk at home a copy of this July 16 issue of *ESPN – The Magazine*, opened to page 42, to the article titled, “I’m Proof That Hope is Never Lost.” I read this article, not once, but a number of times, spiritually moved to tears with nearly each reading.

Josh Hamilton is a recovering crack addict. And he writes that addiction is a humbling experience, and getting it under control is even more humbling. There were nights he prayed never to wake up. He prayed to be spared another day of guilt and depression and addiction. He writes, “I couldn’t continue living the life of a crack addict, and I couldn’t stop either. It was a horrible downward spiral that I had to pull out of, or die. He continued to pray that the Lord would take him away from the nightmare his life had become. He described himself as a dead man - walking.

At his lowest point, Josh did nothing to build up his body; in fact, he did everything to destroy it. There would be five or six months during which he never picked up a ball nor swung a bat. In rehab five or six times, and each time failed to get clean. Josh states, “I was a bad husband, a bad father, and I had no relationship with God. Baseball wasn’t even on my mind.”

At his lowest point, when he was wasting away to skin and bones, and listening to no one, His wife, Katie, told him that he would be back playing baseball someday. Even though she had no reason to, she still believed in her husband. Josh still remembers her very words to him, “You are going to be back playing baseball, because there is a bigger plan for you.” He also remembers that then, he could not even bear to look her in the eye.

In October of 2005, Josh showed up at his grandmother’s house in Raleigh in the middle of the night, coming off a crack binge. He states, “I had the most haunting dream. I was fighting the devil, an awful looking thing. I had a stick or a bat or something, and every time I hit the devil, he’d fall back and get up again. Over and over I

hit him, until I was exhausted and he was still standing. I woke up in a sweat, as if I'd truly been fighting, and the terror that gripped me makes that dream feel real to this day.

"Weeks later, the devil reappeared. It was the same dream, with an important difference. I would hit him and he would bounce back up. The ugliest and most hideous creature one could imagine. The devil seemed unbeatable; I couldn't knock him out.

"But just when I felt like giving up, I felt a presence at my side. I turned my head and saw Jesus, Jesus battling along side me. We kept fighting, and I was filled with strength. The devil didn't stand a chance."

Josh continues, "You can doubt me, but I swear to you I dreamed it. When I woke up, I felt at peace. I wasn't scared. To me the lesson was obvious: Alone, I couldn't win this battle. With Jesus, I couldn't lose."

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From the Revised Standard Version, Matthew 11:28-30 reads:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

A very good friend of mine shared with me not so long ago that all he sees in this world is chaos. He keeps seeking peace and is never able to achieve his goal. I asked him if he was seeking peace within the world, a world that has never seen real peace since the days of the fall of Adam and Eve. If the world has not known peace since creation, then how do we expect to find peace in it now?

Until Jesus comes back to bring eternal peace, what did He say?

"Come to me..." He did not say to seek happiness and peace in the world. Jesus did not say that we will find peace and happiness totally through our own endeavors, nor through the reading of scores of self-help, do-it-by-yourself books or gurus.

Jesus said, "Come to me **all** who labor – all who are weary with the load being carried in this corrupt world; come to me all who are carrying heavy burdens, who are carrying heavy physical and/or spiritual burdens, and I – not the world – I, Jesus, your savior, will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and **you will find rest** for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Where did Josh Hamilton find peace, find happiness? Not in the world; the world nearly destroyed him. Josh found peace and happiness in Jesus Christ.

From John 14:27, Jesus states,

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; *not as the world gives* do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

In whom do we find peace? Jesus. As Josh Hamilton learned so well, peace of mind and spirit cannot be found in this world. Only in Jesus.

Josh wrote, "There is one story that sticks with me, so much so that I think of it everyday. I was driving out of the players' parking lot at Great American Ball park after a game in May, with Katie and out two girls. There's always a group of fans standing at the curb, hoping to get autographs. I stop and sign as many as I can.

"On this particular night, a little boy of about 9 or 10, wearing a Reds cap, handed me a pen and something to sign. Nothing unusual there, but as I was writing, the boy said, 'Josh, you are my savior.'

"This stopped me. I looked at the boy and said, 'Well, thank you. Do you know who my savior is?'

"He thought for a minute. I could see the gears turning. Finally, he smiled and blurted out, 'Jesus Christ!' He said it like he'd just come up with the answer to a test.

“That’s exactly right,’ I said.

“You see, I may not know how I got here from there, but everyday I get a better understanding of why.”

Josh Hamilton is a living example, a living witness, a living messenger of the life saving grace, mercy and peace we find in Jesus Christ. Like our collect for Labor Day, through baseball, Josh truly is serving the common good.

This past week, I telephoned my grandson, who now is a junior at St. Lawrence University. I thanked him for passing this article on to me. And I asked him, “By the way, how is Josh doing this season?”

Andy’s response, “He is going great.”

With the Lord Jesus standing beside us, how can we not be doing great?

Amen? Amen...