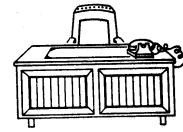


23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 5, 2021



From the Desk of
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

Happy Labor Day Weekend:

Our nation celebrates Labor Day this Monday in accord with an annual tradition that dates back over a century. The idea was first conceived by Peter J. McGuire, founder of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of New York. It was first celebrated in New York City on September 5, 1882, sponsored by the Knights of Labor. Two years later, in 1884, the Labor Unions of New York held a parade on the first Monday of September and referred to it as annual Labor Day celebration. The agitation in New York soon spread to Labor Unions in other states who staged vigorous campaigns to establish Labor Day as a legitimate holiday that honors workers.

Faced with increased unrest from Labor Unions in an election year, Congress passed a bill declaring the first Monday in September a national holiday that honors workers. President Grover Cleveland reluctantly signed the bill in 1894 as an election-year compromise. By the time Labor Day was established as a national holiday, thirty states had already recognized and legitimized Labor Day as a civic holiday.

One of the events that directly impacted the recognition of Labor Day as a national holiday was the Pullman crisis of 1893, which took place in Pullman, Illinois. Caught in the economic depression of 1893, George Pullman, founder and president of the Pullman Company (a railroad sleeping car company) was forced to drastically cut wages and benefits and laid off many workers. Unable to endure the hardship, the remaining employees went on strike, demanding higher wages and better benefits. The American Railway Union joined the cause of the striking workers in Pullman.

President Grover Cleveland declared the strike a federal crime and deployed 12,000 troops to break it up. On August 3, 1894, the strike was declared over, but not before two men lost their lives when deputy marshals fired on protesters in Kensington, Illinois. A week after the crackdown, President Cleveland signed the bill establishing Labor Day as a national holiday.

The Church strongly supports the rights of workers and stresses the spirituality of work. Catholic social teachings on the rights of workers date back to an encyclical published in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII entitled *Rerum Novarum*. It advocates just wages for workers and the need for better conditions of work. Arguably, the encyclical emboldened workers to fight for their rights and may have contributed to the establishment of Labor Day. Other papal encyclicals have continued to advocate the rights and responsibilities of workers.

Work is essential in realizing human potential and fulfilling human responsibilities to self and others. Work provides opportunities to express oneself and put talents and skills to practice. The fruits of human labor come in the form of monetary compensation and other forms of payment. Human labor keeps society functioning but also creates gap between haves and have nots. Human labor is part of the cross we carry and could be redemptive when properly channeled. We also need to ensure that work does not impede our relationship with God.

In this Sunday's gospel, Jesus heals a deaf man with speech impediment by uttering the Aramaic word, "Ephphatha," which means, "Be opened." Daniel Durken wrote that we ought to make it part of our own vocabulary whenever we run into situations where people are uptight. We should say "Ephphatha" to the old who are closed to creativity and change; to all who have lost their sense of humor and turned sour and cynical; to co-workers so that they stay open to challenges and surprises; to ourselves so that we live with eyes open to God's wonders, ears open to God's wisdom, arms and hands open to hug, help and heal. What a word, "EPHPHATHA!"

Wishing everyone Happy Labor Day Weekend!

Fr. Romanus