

OUR LADY QUEEN OF PEACE PARISH
HOMILY SEPTEMBER 3, 2006 (LABOR DAY WEEKEND)
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Introduction

Let me suggest that a phrase from St. James in today's Second Reading, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only", offers us an appropriate theme for this Labor Day weekend. Doing the word so often takes the form or what we set out to do with our lives, with our vocation in life, with the kind of work we do.

And this is the weekend to reflect especially on work – our work – work that is given by God – work as a gift from God.

I This view of work is not very American these days when we see in our culture that too often work is just a way to pay for what we really like to do. People seem to work in order to play.

(Just last evening at table in our Community I was sharing some of these thoughts in preparation for today's homily. One of my housemates told me of a person named Paris Hilton, who has a tv show on which this person mocks those who have to work. I asked my housemate if this "man", Paris Hilton, didn't have to work and was told that he is really a she and, no, she doesn't have to work.)

II Twenty years ago Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical letter entitled "On Human Work" (Laborem Exercens) in which he outlined three requirements for work to be considered appropriate for the human person:

1. It must remunerate – allow for the workers livelihood.
2. It must be fulfilling – we ought to like what we do
3. It must help build God's Reign on earth – a world of unity, freedom, dignity, justice, peace and love.

III These thoughts are well and good as theory and can help in our reflections on work. However, as another Pope, Paul VI (my favorite) once said, what we need are not more theories but witnesses. In that light let me tell you the story of a 50ish Franciscan brother of mine who will pronounce his final vows next Saturday at our central house in New York.

After graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy he spent time on a nuclear submarine in the Pacific. One night, he told me, the sub was sailing on the surface and he was the officer of the day. He felt there an overpowering sense of the Divine, the Transcendent, of God out there in the vastness of the ocean and the sky with thousands of stars overhead. The experience never left him and shortly afterward he resigned from the Navy and went into business. As a very clever person, especially with computers, he made piles of money. But that didn't satisfy him either and one day he called me – someone he knew from his parish where I helped out regularly – and asked if our organization for lay missionaries could use his skills. To make a long story much shorter, he went to Nairobi, Kenya and served a parish in the biggest slum in the world. There he found what seems to be his real vocation – ministry as a Catholic priest. So next Saturday he will take the next

step on that remarkable journey and profess final vows as a Franciscan. He will receive priestly ordination next May.

Conclusion: My prayer today, and I hope yours as well, is that each of us will be doers of the word in our working lives.