

Homily For Sunday, August 31, 2008

Twenty-second Sunday - Ordinary Time - Labor Day Weekend

Introduction

During election years this Labor Day holiday traditionally marks the beginning of formal campaigning for the presidency and other public office in our country. (It does seem this time around as if we have been going through the campaign for an eternity.)

However, that may be, two recent events around Our Lady Queen of Peace enlighten, I think, our reflections on this Labor Day of Election Year 2008.

I

Last Thursday a few of us from the parish participated in a demonstration with hotel workers in Crystal City who are fearful of losing their health care and other benefits, now that the management of their workplace has changed hands. Most of the demonstrators were people of color - more than likely immigrants - all working at entry level jobs. They find themselves in precarious financial situations. A few of them were members of our parish community.

II

Closer to home, the mother of several small children came to the parish this past week. Her husband had been taken from his workplace in one of those "sweeps" being carried out by the INS these days. After being held incommunicado for nearly a month, the man was deported to his home country of Guatemala this past Wednesday, despite the fact that he was in the United States legally and despite the efforts of a bi-lingual lawyer whom St. Anthony's Parish in Falls Church had secured for him.

His wife's name is Lorena Raymundo Reyes and I name her simply to underscore the fact that people like her actually have names; they have histories and families, hopes and dreams - and yes tragedies.

III

On this election year Labor Day in the light of these two recent incidents the obvious question is: who will speak for these at risk people. I have not heard much at all about people like these from the Democrats who met in convention this past week. Nor do I expect to hear much from the Republicans about them in their convention this coming week. We do hear a great deal from both parties about us middle class and how the candidates will protect our rights and privileges. They are looking for our votes. But what about these others? Where is the concern for the most vulnerable?

IV

There are 36.5 million Americans living below the poverty line in our country. That is, one-tenth of our entire population lives on less than \$200 per week - and since 2000 the number has grown by 6 million individuals.

Who will speak for them?

15.6 million people in our country live in "extreme poverty". That is, they exist on less than \$100 per week.

Who will speak for them?

In the rest of the world the picture is far worse:

-3 billion human beings - half the population of the planet - live on less than \$2 per day

Who will speak for them?

-the poorest 40% of the world's population receive just 5% of the world's income

Who will speak for them?

-between 26,000 and 30,000 children die EACH DAY as a result of poverty

Who will speak for them?

-27% or 28% of all children in underdeveloped areas are underweight or stunted

Who will speak for them?

-of the 2.2 billion children in the world today fully 1 billion of them live in poverty

Who will speak for them?

It does seem that the People of God, we in the faith communities of this country must speak wherever we can about this scandal.

V

Perhaps this holiday weekend we shall hear sung "America The Beautiful" and the line "America, America, God shed His grace on thee".

We are indeed a graced country with incredible natural and economic resources. We have always profited enormously from wave after wave of vigorous immigrant populations who came here and enriched our country. But again, Jesus' words "to whom much has

been given, much is expected" (Luke 12:48) follow on those words from "America The Beautiful".

Conclusion

May I suggest that we make one of our prayers this holiday the wish expressed by the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops in their Labor Day Statement for 2008: "[that this holiday] bring a renewed vigor as we seek to build together a society that cares for its own, reaches out to the poor and vulnerable, and offers true hope to all. Let us share justly and freely the goods of society and advance the good of every person". May it be so.