

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Labor Pains

This Monday we Americans mark the traditional end of summer, and the day when we celebrate those who labor. Most of us have a welcome day off, a three-day weekend.

Before you decide to thank your boss for a holiday, take a moment to remember the one who really made it possible. The first laborer. The great grandfather of gardening. The sultan of sweat.

I'm speaking, of course, of Adam.

He was the one, after all, who bit off more than he could chew—literally. He took the fruit, and took the fall.

And for that, ever since, we have worked—earning our way by labor, the sweat of our brow.

Over the eons, we have tilled soil, harvested crops, dug trenches, caught fish. Nowadays, we're more likely to send emails or stuff file folders. Whatever we do, we work. We toil. We have someplace to go on Monday morning, and something to complain about until Friday night. We have a reason to watch the clock, ignore emails, drink bad coffee and doze through long meetings. We have Post-it notes stuck to our computer screens, and calendars tacked to bulletin boards, and laser printers with low toner and copy machines that are perpetually jammed.

Thanks, Adam.

Genesis describes it succinctly: because of Adam's disobedience, we have to work. End of discussion. There goes Eden; here comes the shovel, the plow and federal withholding tax. Clearly, God does not appreciate those who break the rules. There are penalties for everything. (And what Catholic who has spent any time in the confessional doesn't know that?)

And yet, despite all we humans must live with, and live through, we are offered a tantalizing invitation. "Come to me," Jesus says, "all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

After Adam's fall, who among us is not burdened? Who among us does not labor? Who among us does not need some rest? (You people who have been summering in East Hampton are excused ...)

The First Man gave the world work. But the New Man offers us rest and renewal. He gives meaning to the work of our hands and the struggles of our soul. The burdens we bear are lifted onto His shoulders. We have hope. As Emily Dickinson put it, we dwell in possibility.

We have, in short, the glorious prospect of the ultimate Three Day Weekend—eternal salvation.

In the grand scheme of things, we would not be where we are now without Christ to offer us redemption.

And we would never have needed Him without Adam.

They are, in many ways, the two faces of our long-suffering humanity: the fallen, and the risen. The mortal and the immortal.

These days, Adam is easily overlooked. But anyone who has filled out a time sheet, cashed a paycheck and counted the days until retirement can thank him. He got us into this mess.

Thank God—truly—that Christ came to get us out of it.

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