

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Labor Is Dignified **Labor Day** Monday, September 5, 2016 8:15 AM
1 Thes 4:1b-2, 9-12; Mt 6:31-34 (Labor is an opportunity for human beings to partner
with God in the ordering of creation.)

Today we celebrate Labor Day, and the **opening prayer of the Mass is that everyone would find work that was fitting for his or her dignity.** That's actually a very tall order; that's actually a very big prayer because **no one has a clue how to do this.** For example, in my house I have this marvelous thing called a microwave. I've another marvelous thing called a dishwasher, another marvelous thing called a dryer and a clothes washer. And because of this I'm perfectly able to take care of all my basic needs with no effort at all. When I was ordained every rectory had a housekeeper; now almost none do. And it's because of the microwave, the dishwasher that just makes life easy. So this is good; it's good except that **now people that might have worked don't have a job. And so it is with so many modern conveniences.** They are great, but they put a lot of people out of work, especially more simple people, people without great education or great creativity. What are they going to do? This is a problem, and I don't know anybody that has a solution. And by the way, you won't hear our politicians talk about it because they know there's no solution, so they talk around everything.

But this is our prayer today. **Our prayer is that we will find a way to get people to be employed according to their own dignity because work is dignified.** It is not something to be reduced to a unit of something or other that can be evaluated in terms of its cost. That's not what labor is. Labor is not a cost. **Labor is an opportunity for human beings to partner with God in the ordering of creation.** That's exactly what all the prayers of today's liturgy say. And that is our belief.

Now it's true the Church is rooted in a past civilization where things were very different from what they are today. But values are what we need to keep and recognize and somehow

transfer into our new environment; and how this will be done, I do not know. But **since everyone is called to be a partner with God** in doing something worthwhile, something engaging, something in which they really make a contribution, **then there has to be a way to do it.** And we have to recognize that when it comes to building the kingdom of God, as we talk about, as Jesus talked about, **we don't have necessarily a blueprint:** this is what to do. No, **we have an idea of the goal; we do not know the means to choose.** So **part of our work is creating the means.** And will this be done tomorrow? No. Or next year? No. But it is what we have to work on.

Acknowledging this is of course part of our dignity that **God respects us enough to realize that we can solve this problem.** Indeed, we can solve our problems of survival on this planet. And that is the issue today. Will we? Yes, we will, I say, I believe, I hope. Others don't. There are those who don't think we will ever do it, but then they don't have faith. So this celebration is really **a call to faith in ourselves, which is already a gift from God.** We are a gift from God. And if God made us right, and he did, and if he has endowed us with all the things we need, and he did, then we can fulfill the hope that the gospels proclaim.