

An American flag is shown waving against a vibrant sunset sky with orange and yellow hues. The stars and stripes of the flag are clearly visible.

WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

For most people, Labor Day, this year, September 7, signals the end of summer. That can also mean the end of vacations and the return to school. Did you know that it was officially signed into law by President Grover Cleveland on June 28, 1894? It was the culmination of a difficult period in our country's history, the Industrial Revolution, during which working conditions were not always good. There were a number of labor protests, some turning violent, in particular the Haymakers Riot of 1886 and then the Pullman Palace Car Company strike of 1894. Out of this tragic history came better days for labor. In fact, the traditional work week that we know, the 40-hour work week, didn't become normal until the 1940's. Thus, hidden beneath it being a marker for the unofficial end of the summer season, Labor Day celebrates the great progress we have made in the treatment of workers. It is also important to note that the Church has always stood by and advocated for the just and fair treatment of labor. In addition, that day also honors and highlights the value and dignity of work. In its teaching and the Scriptures, the Church also proclaims the importance of being productive: "God blessed them and God said to them: 'Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:28) There is a human need, given to us by God, to work, to make a difference, to make things, to contribute, to improve life, to be productive.

Thus, while it is important for workers be treated fairly, it is also important for workers to work! I have heard from many people who have personally experienced the idiom, "It's hard to get good help these days." Many struggle to find people who will show up, keep showing up, and do the work. As obvious as that should be, in too many cases that doesn't happen. Fortunately, I have also talked to many people who joyfully sing the praises of someone they have found who did great work. They gladly offer their recommendation for such a reliable and good worker.

That profound truth is resoundingly brought home to me right here at St. Mary's. As you know, we have many ministries. What is ministry? It is many things, but the bottom line is that its free labor! Stop and think about it. So much of what we call ministry is a paid job in other contexts. Think of all the wonderful things that happen here at St. Mary's. It is done by volunteers! Our recent carnival is Exhibit A!

The other part of that fact is that many of those involved in the parish are not just senior citizens, but retired. I have watched people who are "retired" work as hard at their ministry as if they were still going to work! That is a testament to their character, but it also reminds us that as human beings we want to be productive, in other words, to work.

All of this might be too much to think about as your eating a hamburger or hot dog, but I hope you have a least a moment to give thanks, thanks for the great progress for workers in our country, and in celebration of all our wonderful workers, some paid and some volunteer! Happy Labor Day.

"God looked at everything He made, and found it very good. Evening came and morning followed, the sixth day." (Genesis 1:31)