

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In 2004, I took a weekend off from my Vicarage near Rochester, NY to go visit my girlfriend at Valpo, so that I could take her out in Chicago and propose to her. The fastest route from Rochester to Valpo is across Southern Ontario and through Michigan. I ran into a little car trouble on the way back. It was Monday, but it was Labor Day, so I had a difficult time finding a mechanic to help. Fortunately, I made it back to Rochester safely with my car in one piece. I discovered a couple of things, much to my chagrin: 1.) The U.S. and Canada celebrate Labor Day on the same day, and 2.) The irony that no one works on “Labor” Day.

It is a holiday, so that second point wasn’t really a surprise. Labor Day was established to honor the Labor movement. And we have much to thank them for – fair wages, 8 hr. work day, 40 hr. work week, just to name a few. But more than that it was a holiday intended for the working class, to honor and celebrate their contribution to society. The world would not be nearly as great without the hard work of so many people doing thankless, dangerous, and exhausting jobs. It’s a very easy holiday to get behind. At the very least who doesn’t like a day off work – other than the guy in Southern Ontario with car trouble, that is.

What most people don’t know is that about 30 years after the first Labor Day was held, they pushed for the Sunday to become “Labor Sunday,” a time set aside to focus on the spiritual and education aspects of the Labor movement. Needless to say, this gained little traction and was quickly abandoned. People are happy to take a day off work, but spend a day focused on the spiritual and education? Not so much. It reminds me of what Jesus said a few weeks ago in the Gospel Lesson from John: *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.* He was trying to get people to look beyond the physical to the spiritual. He had about as much success as the Labor movement, well at least before his death and resurrection. After Easter, it was a different story. But it is still a struggle, even for Christians to heed our Lord’s advice.

It’s interesting, though, that we actually have a spiritual labor day already. It’s called the Sabbath. God created everything in 6 days and on the 7 he rested. He gave that day of rest as a gift to his creation, so that his creatures could rest from their labors. Not just to kick back and rest, but also to have time to spend with their creator. We honor this not by refusing to lift a finger for 24 hrs. like the Pharisees. No, we honor it by turning away from our worldly work to be with God – to gladly hear and learn from his Word, to receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through his Word and Sacraments, to offer him our worship and praise, to approach his throne of grace in prayer. These are the essence of obeying the 3rd Commandment to remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. More than that it is how we work for food that leads to eternal life. Jesus said that the work of the Father is to believe in the one he sent, his own Son. God’s Word and Sacraments and the Sabbath Day of rest are his gifts to us to help us believe in Jesus.

So, as we once again enjoy some rest and relaxation this Labor Day, as we honor and celebrate all the hard work of the working class, let us also remember the work that leads to eternal life, rejoicing that we have a day set aside to remember the spiritual labor of Christ, not just once a year, but every single week. I hope that you will have (or have had, depending on when you read this) a happy and safe Labor Day, and I pray that you continue to remember the Sabbath, by keeping it holy, taking time away from all your physical labors, to spend time with God, receiving the fruits of his spiritual labor that leads to eternal life.

In Christ,
Pastor Holyer

P.S. – She said, “Yes.”