

Homily based on the readings from September 1, 2025 (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18; Luke 4.16-30)

Today, as we all know, is Labor Day, a date set aside to commemorate the social and economic achievements of the American worker. It is important to remember that our Lord himself grew up in a working-class family. Saint Joseph was a carpenter, and there is every reason to believe that Jesus spent his childhood learning the same trade.

Work, in whatever form we are capable of performing it, is an essential component of Christian life. In fact, that was basically the point of the Gospel reading we heard this past Saturday morning. Perhaps one of the most beautiful manifestations of this principle is the Rule of Saint Benedict, the quintessential manual of Western monasticism. The Benedictine life is summed up by their motto, *ora et labora*: prayer and work. Over the past few years, I have had the privilege of taking several retreats at a Benedictine monastery. It is amazing to see how the work

and the prayer of the Benedictine brothers are seamlessly integrated, like *breath* coming from two separate lungs.

The importance of work – even routine physical work – is emphasized throughout the New Testament. Four of the original twelve apostles were fishermen, a trade that requires intense physical effort. Saint Paul, who was himself a tent-maker, went so far as to say that “[i]f anyone will not work, let him not eat.” Our Lord himself employs the language of labor to describe the commission he is entrusting to his disciples: “The harvest is abundant,” he tells us, “but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.”

We often think about this labor – proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ – as being a specialized task for a few anointed clergymen, but it is actually a responsibility that falls to all of us – by virtue of our baptism. We may feel wholly inadequate for this kind of work – and that is a *good* thing. If we believed ourselves worthy of performing this task, we almost certainly would not be. Remember the words of Saint Paul:

Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God.

I have heard this passage summarized as follow: God does not choose the *qualified*, but he qualifies the *chosen*.

Today, as we celebrate labor by largely refraining from it, we should spend some time reflecting on the work God is calling us to do. What specific tasks should we be performing to bring the Kingdom of Heaven closer to reality – here and now, in our own community? The labor itself is not easy, and it will not make us popular. As we heard today, “no prophet is accepted in his own native place.” Nevertheless, it is what we are called to do, it is what we must do – every single hour of

every single day, until we hear our Lord pronounce those longed-for words of rest: “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”