

SERMON: LABOR DAY WEEKEND 2011

Introduction

Labor Day, the first Monday in September, is a creation of the labor movement of the late 19th century, dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. I am sure it was not universally well received. The Age of the "Robber Barons" had exhibited its excesses, and the typical laborer was not of great concern to society at large. The idea of lifting up the laborer would be a reforming idea, subject to much criticism and fear on the part of some. As many of you well know, the history of the labor movement is not a history of sweetness and light.

New York City produced the first Labor Day holiday at the behest of its Central Labor Union on Tuesday, September 5, 1882. In 1884, the first Monday in September was selected as the time to host the "workingmen's holiday." This idea took root and eventually spread around many states, but not all. In 1894 Congress legislated that the first Monday in September would be a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories.

The original intent of the holiday included the idea of having a street parade to exhibit "the strength and esprit de corps of the trade and labor organizations" of the community, in combination with a festival for recreation and enjoyment.

Speech giving by prominent men and women evolved as part of the Labor Day structure as time moved forward, giving economic and civic significance to the holiday. BBQ and politics are all part of the Labor Day scene in much of our country.

Labor Sunday

Note that in 1909, the American Federation of Labor established that the Sunday preceding Labor Day would be known as "Labor Sunday," dedicated to the spiritual and educational aspects of the labor movement. So, here we are on "Labor Sunday," 2011, two days after the the *New York Daily News'* headline read:

August 2011 jobs report: NO net jobs created, unemployment rate unchanged at 9.1%.

Prayer

This is not the forum for economic debate; however, this particular holiday coupled with the current jobs report of Friday is difficult to ignore. This trend has been long in the making, mixed up with the complexities of globalization, and we need creative leadership to deal with the new economic and social realities of this century. The underlying strengths of this country are magnificent. Let us pray that our leaders address our economic crises thoughtfully, carefully, without rancor, and with respect for the needs of the whole country.

Our *Book of Common Prayer* offers countless opportunities for both corporate and individual prayer. Today, in recognition of all those who seek to work, but have not found work, and for those who are dramatically under-employed by either level or percentages of time, please turn now to page 824 and pray with me the prayer entitled *For the Unemployed*:

Heavenly Father, we remember before you those who suffer want and anxiety from lack of work. Guide the people of this land so to use our public and private wealth that all may find suitable and fulfilling employment, and receive just payment for their labor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Consider copying this prayer and putting it before you on a daily basis. It is one real way that each of us is able to contribute to the conversation about people in our nation who need work, including people right here in our pews. We, as people of faith, know that corporate prayer and private prayer is powerful for the person praying and for those for whom we pray.

Next Sunday's 10th Anniversary of 9.11

This Sunday also launches us into the week of preparation before the 10th Anniversary of the horrific occasion of September 11, 2001. Many of you will have read my article about my experience that day in our newsletter, the *CHIMES*. Each of you has your own story, your own remembrance, your own pain and confusion. I think it is important to pay attention to this milestone coming up and not only honor those who died or who were injured trying to help others, but to sooth your own soul.

On Friday night, September 16th, here at St. James, for example, the Bach Collegium is presenting Mozart's *Requiem in D Minor*, marking the 10th anniversary of the

September 11, 2001. I ordered my ticket on-line. I did this because I know my own soul needs soothing, and I have confidence that the performance will be splendid at many levels, including and especially at the spiritual level.

You can do the same or attend any number of events in our community, or stay at home and do your own version of remembering. It *is* a time of national mourning, coupled with our collective spiritual hope for peace. Be sure and be here next Sunday when we present our own liturgical and musical remembrance at the 10.00 service. Coming together for worship will be important to all of us.

Psalm 149

Borrowing from the Psalm appointed for today, I close with the call of the psalmist for us to sing: "Hallelujah! Sing to the Lord a new song..."

Isn't that what we are called to do now? Sing a new song. I feel I am. Sing the praise of the Lord in a new way. Can we do that? I think we can. I think we can at the national level, at the diocesan and parish level, as well at our own personal, individual level.

It means we have to dig down deeply and bring out new notes, new visions, and new solutions to new and old problems. We can get out our timbrel and harp and dance to the music of opportunity to live together in creative harmony and forge new ways to love and serve the Lord—right here at St. James, in San Diego. Going forward, learning from the past, using our human capability of creativity and imagination, will propel us to new places of love, where we can, as our Epistle reading today implores us to do-- reach out to one another in love and to the "other," the stranger, in the spirit of the Christ. Amen and Hallelujah!

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