

A Labor Day Reflection

by

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Father Greg's prompting caused me to write a Labor Day Reflection - for that I thank him.

In keeping with our theme, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the work of the Sisters of Divine Providence. As teachers, administrators, nurses and a myriad of other ministries, they've left lasting impressions on many of our lives.

Tomorrow is Labor Day, a national holiday that began in 1882 to honor the men and women of our country's workforce.

Personally, the day is special to me.

Why?

Because I earned a living for 35 years as a laborer while doing one of the toughest jobs in construction, mason tender. A man that assists the bricklayer by mixing mortar, building the scaffold, stocking the scaffold with brick, cleaning up, but doesn't lay a brick. Not a very glamorous job.

But our attention is directed toward today. A look around this simple but beautiful chapel where we gather to celebrate the Eucharist holds the fruits of labor.

The terrazzo floor, the unique altar, the statue of Mary at the wedding, the vaulted ceiling, the stained glass windows, the stations of the cross, are the combined skills of many craftsmen.

And as you leave this Provincial Motherhouse, look upward at the imposing bell tower, a true architectural gem. Notice the brickwork at the highest level. Those brick weren't laid by angels, no but by the strength-sapping efforts of bricklayers and mason tenders.

I've had many work related experiences over the years. One that stands out in my memory is when I worked on the Senator Morehead State Office Building on Liberty Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh. At 23 stories, it was the highest I ever worked. We were working off swinging scaffolds while setting 400 pound store panels. We had our safety belts hooked up at all times, but you were always a bit tense. The scaffold was 16 foot long by 4 feet wide. Cranks on either end were used to raise or lower the platform.

The idea when raising the swing is to do it evenly. In one instance the lift became uneven, with me being low and my partner high to the point where he yelled "when are you going to start crankin' man" in language more colorful than this.

Humor is always a welcome companion in a trade so harsh. Friday signals the end of the work week. And it usually is payday. Friday night is the green light to be out and about on the town.

Case in point.

Four of us went out to dinner in a nice restaurant one Friday night. After dinner, we struck up a conversation with four young ladies at the table next to us.

One of the ladies asked one of my co-workers, "What do you do for a living?" With puffed up chest, he answered, "well, I'm a burnt clay artist." The three of us almost fell off our chairs laughing at his creative description of his job. As I said, humor.

Let me leave you with this thought:

As you go about doing your chores throughout the day, be it washing clothes, cutting grass or planning meals, take a moment and remember that little phrase turned easily into a prayer because in essence, what you're really doing is the work of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.