

## Why Our Work Matters

As a child, one of my favorite authors and poets was Shel Silverstein, and one of his little poems I remember was called "Hurk" which goes like this:

I'd rather play tennis than go to the dentist.  
I'd rather play soccer than go to the doctor.  
I'd rather play Hurk than go to work.  
Hurk? Hurk? What's Hurk?  
I don't know, but it must be better than work.

I still haven't figured out what that is either.

Admittedly, like all of us, I look forward to vacation and down time. But one thing that is important to remember is how much work matters and the impact it has on other people.

When I was about 7 or so I remember my dad taking me to work with him one night to see where he worked. He was one of the maintenance guys at a high school. To a 7 year old it seemed amazing. He had his own chair and desk. He had a special key to access an elevator. And a huge building to work in. Well of course all of this required a whole lot of maintenance (if you don't believe me, I'd be happy to introduce to any of the members of our amazing maintenance team here Saint Joes.) As the years went by, I came to learn of how much he did at the buildings he worked at. He'd maintain the boilers; wax the floors; help teachers with millions of things and make sure the buildings always looked great. He'd even go above and beyond sometimes reading for kids, even playing his guitar and singing a class a song. Small wonder he was loved by so many of the teachers at the schools he served at. His work ethic also carried over into the home. He would always be there for me after school to throw the ball around or run up to the local parks for some sledding in the winter; he'd help my grandparents with their needs, and work hard around the house. Mom was the same way. They, and indeed so many others, have taught me so much by their work.

Work can be hard; and many of us dream of not working or winning the lottery, but deep down, I think we also realize work is a good thing, for through work, we make a difference. We make the world a better place, and make ourselves better too. We learn new skills and find new gifts as we persevere at education and training from learning how to be a doctor to computer technician to mechanic to everything else in between. It takes effort going through the training, but in the end we look back and say "wow, I learned things about myself I never even knew" and then use those skills to make this world a bit more better.

For another, people take up their cross, which is what the disciple must do. In Saint John Paul II's encyclical on human labor, he points out how we participate in the work of the Creator and the Redeemer in that we imitate God in working and resting, and that "He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform." I think that is so evident in how so many

people give of their time, even when they do not want to, because they recognize that their job is important for their company, for themselves if they are going to be a productive member of society, and for those who rely on them.

We also must remember how we are indeed many parts of one body. I think of the people I'm privileged to work with at Saint Joe's. They care so deeply about the greater good; from the teachers who work so hard to help the students grow in knowledge and faith; to our administrative staff and maintenance team and everyone else. So much of what happens in a parish goes unseen; but we all know it's a lot more than Mass on Sunday. I've never met someone who works here for the money. It's not to say we do not try to pay a just wage, but no one gets wealthy working for the Catholic Church. What a blessing it is to work with such an amazing team, and on top of that to know so many wonderful parishioners who volunteer and give so generously of their time and talent.

And finally, we also can't forget how our actions speak so loudly. We might not think about it, but through our labor, we not only take up our Cross, but serve as a proclaimer of the Gospel.

I love photography, and were I to in the lottery I could easily find places all over the world to go and photograph nature, and have a great time and fill my calendar. But deep down, I know I'd be missing something: what I was really called to do. No matter what it is you do in life, everyone who has ever worked makes a real difference in the world by helping society to improve and helping others who rely on them, but so too by being a true evangelist and a beacon to others that being a disciple of Christ means backing it up with actions. Your work matters - and my hope too is that you don't let it consume your life, but also make time for rest, family, friends, and hobbies. Hopefully we remember that and strive to live the balanced life, and take Labor Day to enjoy a summer barbecue, celebrating the fact that through our work, we transform the world and also help show one another what the faith is all about.

God bless & Happy Labor Day Weekend,

Fr. Paul