

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 9, 2023

Many people don't like their jobs. Isn't that true? Now, I'm not saying that I know the exact percentage of people who don't really look forward to going off to work each and every day (or who dread turning on their laptops and starting another day of interacting with clients and customers and colleagues). All I know is that many people respond to, "How's work?" with a shrug or a frown or a complaint about their job. Those are the responses I usually get. Rarely do I hear, "It's so great. I look forward to it every day!"

Of course, some people truly "enjoy" their jobs, truly find them pleasant or meaningful or rewarding or exciting. Many of us envy those sorts of people (or possibly even resent them). And the people who don't like their jobs probably wonder what is different about those people's experiences, what's making them (or allowing them to) love the work they do. Of course, there isn't just one answer. There could be many reasons. Maybe they like their bosses. Maybe they like the pay. Maybe they like their co-workers. Maybe all of the above.

But if I had to guess the main reason as to why some people really like their jobs, I imagine it has something to do with the work itself, something to do with the actual thing they do. Maybe, just maybe these sorts of people are finding something "important" in what they do. Maybe they make a product they can be proud of. Maybe they help people who need help with something significant. Maybe they find themselves putting a smile on people's faces as they go about their daily tasks. Or maybe they somehow are simply able to leave work each day imagining that the world is a tiny bit better because of the work they did.

Put simply, maybe the key is being able to focus on the difference one can make in the lives of others, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. In other words, a day lived for someone else or for other people is a day well-lived. And maybe that is its own reward, maybe that's what turns

drudgery into something more, something of little value into something of greater value, something which on the surface seems pointless into something of greater meaning.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”

That sounds so good, doesn't it? Who wouldn't want that? But how exactly does that happen? How do we not let our burdens, our sorrows, our labors get the best of us? What does Jesus mean when he says, “Come to me?” The answer might lie in what Jesus said next in the Gospel passage we just heard from St. Matthew.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me . . . and you will find rest . . .”

That statement by Jesus is actually a “two-parter” - containing two important ideas. The first is actually the easier of the two, and it is the idea of “communion”. And it appears that Jesus doesn't want us to just approach him with fear and trepidation and baby steps. He wants us to come close, as he comes close to us as well, and join ourselves to him, forge “bonds” with him, take his hand in ours, “yoke” ourselves to him so that we are connected in a powerful, intimate, lasting way. And there are many ways to do this. It starts with intention, that is, we must WANT to be in communion with him, a strong desire to be, to want to be joined to him. And we do that by prayer, and humility, and trust. We do that through the words of Sacred Scripture, through the Sacraments, and through the faith and support of one another. And most of us truly want to embrace that part of Jesus' invitation, we want a certain closeness with our God.

But the second part of Jesus' statement is the more challenging part, the invitation to “learn” from him. And the reason this is more difficult is because this demands much from us, we are required to make an effort, it requires not just a whole different way of thinking, but also a whole different way of acting. And so, “learning” from Jesus and by extension,

“imitating” him is the part so many of us resist, for it costs everything, costs our whole selves.

St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans uses the words “flesh” and Spirit” to make this crucial distinction. In St. Paul’s mind, to live “in the flesh” is to live solely for oneself, to live as if the things of this world are all that matters. But living “in the Spirit” is something altogether different, a kind of selflessness that measures the value of our actions only by whether or not they have served someone else, whether or not they involve a turning outward rather than turning inward, whether or not we have considered the needs of someone else before our own. And I believe that’s our biggest challenge.

And so, maybe that’s the “rest” Jesus is talking about, the kind of rest that brings peace and refreshment even in the midst of our difficulties and challenges, our disappointments and our labors. Maybe that’s the main reason behind why some people love their jobs. Maybe some of us are just a little better at finding ways to stay focused on the way our work makes the lives of others a little better, rather than only seeing our work as a means to make our own lives more comfortable.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me and you will find rest . . .”

So let’s find ways to “yoke” ourselves more securely to Jesus, to learn from him, and begin truly living “in the Spirit” that is, living for others. We might just find that the work we used to “dread” we will now see in a much different light.