The Hardest Job of All

Labor Day.

Of course, labor means work. And work, of course, is usually affiliated with the word “hard”. Hard work.

I am guessing this is why somewhere along the way the word for “work” became affiliated with giving birth, as in “going into labor” and “labor pains.” Giving birth, I’m told, is probably one of the most painful of human activities. (Though a woman once told me that she had both given birth and had kidney stones and she would have rather given birth!).

So, what might be the hardest of work for us as Christians, as disciples of Jesus Christ?

What’s the hardest part of being a Christian for you?

Getting up on Sunday? Going to Church every week? It’s a bit of a sacrifice, I’m sure, especially if you work all sorts of crazy hours and Sunday may be your only day to sleep in. Or, if all your peers are taking their children to sporting events on Sunday and you take your kids to Mass instead … that could be hard work.

To not conform to the norms of society, that might be the hardest work for us … to not give in to what everyone else is thinking and doing. That can be tough.

St. Paul said in our second reading today: “Do not conform yourselves to the present age,” which is pretty funny because he said this to the Romans and as everybody knows, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Paul says no.

Jesus said, “think like God thinks, not like people think.” To think like God thinks is really hard work.

Jesus gets rather miffed with Peter for not thinking like God. Jesus explains he will go to Jerusalem where he will be suffered, killed and raised on the third day.
Peter says, “God forbid! That will not happen to you!” He doesn’t want Jesus to suffer and be killed.

When we think like human beings, we hear only suffering and killed. When we think like God, we hear raised on the third day. Life prevails. Love prevails. But life and love cannot merrily skip over the suffering part.

Maybe that’s where the phrase “labor of love” came from. Loving is hard work. Maybe that’s the hardest job: loving one another the way Jesus loves us which is denying one self, taking up His cross, and following Him.

Go back to St. Paul: “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Give of yourself completely without counting the cost. We see so many doing exactly this down in Texas and Louisiana. We saw it up here during Sandy and 9/11. During crises, people give of themselves, offer themselves in amazing ways.

It’s interesting, isn’t it: two weeks ago we saw examples of hatred, division, racism, and then a storm hits. In a crisis, there is no such thing as white skin or black skin or brown skin. In a crisis, we put our differences aside, we put our fear aside – we think like God, we love like Jesus.

Rescuing those in danger is a labor of love. Helping those who are hurting is a labor of love. That happens during a catastrophe like Harvey, but it also can happen daily.

Not taking the easy way out, but offering ourselves to another, giving our time, our attention to another, is a living sacrifice, it is denying our self and taking up the cross of Christ.

For disciples of Jesus Christ every day is Labor Day. Every day we work on behalf of a higher cause, doing the hard work of discerning God’s will, thinking like God thinks, following Christ, loving as Jesus loves, giving birth to a new world of peace and joy and hope for all people!