

WHERE IS OUR PLACE? – SEPTEMBER 2, 2007

This weekend in Canada, we are celebrating the Labour Day long weekend. In a sense this weekend marks the end of the summer and heralds the start up of the fall's activities. School goes back into session this week and the many community activities begin to gear up. In short, the lazy days of summer are over and the pace of life quickens.

Labour Day has a long history in our country. The weekend is to celebrate those who work hard to ensure we have food on our tables, transportation, civic services and manufacturing.

It is an acknowledgement that hard work and team effort is fundamental to the life we enjoy.

Today we may have lost that sense that everything comes from hard back work and the sweat of the brow. Our modern world, well into the information age, can mislead us to think hard work is no longer required. The fact remains, however, that we still need to put a lot of effort in what we do to ensure success whatever our occupation may be.

All of us remember our school years, hopefully mostly pleasant. While cherishing the summer holidays, we also looked forward to seeing our friends at school. These rituals of young life are with each generation: the nervousness of the young child about to go to junior kindergarten or grade one; the confidence of the older child; going from being the big kid in junior high to the new kid in the high school.

My memories for many years were of the small one room school with grades one to eight. One teacher was responsible for all subjects as well as the discipline in the room. Tasks were assigned to each person each week such as cleanup, beating the brushes to get out the chalk dust and carrying in the water. We sat and listened to all the lessons for the various grades and learned many things by just being there. One of the highlights was the planning for the Christmas Concert, a not to be missed event.

So here we are, Labour Day, that weekend which marks the major transition in our communities to fall and winter activities.

For our parish, this Sunday marks the last Sunday our two congregations worship jointly together. We move back to two services of worship next Sunday at Mountainview and Demerestville. As we can see, the season of busyness even enters our religious worship life. In this busyness we need to remember always our God and his place in our lives.

Our first lesson today was from the Book of the prophet Jeremiah. Here Jeremiah, early on in his young ministry of prophesy, speaks of the tendency of people to forget the lessons and the experiences of the past as they rush forward in daily busyness.

God wonders with Jeremiah as to what went so wrong. How is it, God laments, that his people have strayed so far from the days when he delivered them from the slavery of Egypt and brought them to the promised land. Why have the people gone after all that is worthless and in the process become worthless themselves?

Do they not remember anything, God asks Jeremiah. Once they got into the promised land, they quickly defiled it and rushed around forgetting their past. God even despairs that his priests have forgotten to call on him and in fact do not really know him. All levels of society in Jeremiah's day were forgetful of God and moving quickly to worship other idols of greed, position and power. Have they changed their loyalty to God to other, empty gods?

God proclaims to Jeremiah that his people have committed two evils: first, they have forsaken the true God and secondly have put their trust in lesser, empty things.

This passage of Jeremiah is an important reminder to us even today. In our busyness and our wanting to experience all that there is in our world, we must not forget the God who is behind all that has been created. Do not forget to thank him for all he has done and to honour him in our words and actions at all times.

It is so easy to forget as we rush back into our activities. God calls us to think back and remember all his goodness. Do not forget him as we go through our days, for God never forgets us or leaves our side.

The Psalm reading we had this morning echoes some of the themes we had from Jeremiah. The two verses before those we read went like this: "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would have none of me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsel." As Jeremiah had previously observed, God does not push people where they do not want to go. If the people of Israel were determined to stray from their God, then so be it. Let them go so they can in time see the errors of their ways.

We have here a picture of God resigned to the forgetfulness of his people. If that is what you want, then fine. Go and find out for yourself how barren life can be when you no longer have God walking beside you at your request or because of your actions.

Then the psalmist speaks of God's musing on what the people are missing by their wandering ways. O that my people would listen to me and walk in my ways, says God. Then they would see my power and favour as they defeat their foes. God would feed his people with the food of life.

This "if only" is important for us to hear even today in 2007. We can not assume God to be there always if we neglect our praise, if we believe we are strong without him. Any relationship we have requires care and attention, including our relationship with our Creator.

Our Gospel reading this week is from St. Luke. Luke recalls an occasion when Jesus is at a banquet. Jesus watches as the guests jockey for the best locations to sit with careful attention as to who has the seats of honour.

Jesus spoke of a better routine. Do not sit in the place of highest honour only to have the host come and ask you to move aside for a more honoured guest. Rather, sit in a humbler location and then the host may come and move you to a place of greater prominence. Before all those present, you will be elevated.

Jesus used this example for the following words: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”.

This saying was not well received by the men of his day who jostled daily for recognition. In our day it is very little different from then. People struggle so hard to get ahead and receive the recognition of their success. What is the point of all this if in the process, one loses ones humanity and contact with family and friends who give value to life.

We live in a time of great pressure on people to be active all the time. We have jobs, gardens, yards to maintain, community activities and activities around squiring our children or grandchildren to so many sports events. This often requires two cars and other mechanical devices to allow us to do all of these activities faster and faster.

As we spend time together on this Labour Day weekend, let it be a time for us to take stock as to what is important in life as we gear up for the fall activities. Let us be determined to live life to the fullest and experience the goodness of life all around us.

Especially, let us ensure we daily remember God’s part in all we do. He is our Creator and our abiding friend and remains loyal to us in spite of our neglect of our prayers and words of thanksgiving.

We look forward in our Parish to the activities of the months ahead, the times for fellowship and study, the opportunities to worship and share our faith with one another.

Enjoy this weekend. Take the time to enjoy the beauty of nature all around you and rejoice in our blessings in this country.