

This Labour Day reflection is intended to apply to every day of our lives. We engage in leisure, we work, and we labour. In all three we are active, mentally and/or physically.

In leisure or play we engage in activity for its own sake, activity which gives us joy and a sense of accomplishment.

In work we engage in activity which has a purpose beyond itself. We look after something, make it grow, create something worthwhile. God works: He creates the universe, sees that it is good, and takes a day of rest after His work was done. He brought Adam into the garden of Eden and asked him to guard it and to work its soil. This was before Adam's fall so we can imagine that this work was not only useful but also very pleasurable.

But after Adam was chased out of the garden, work for him became labour, something difficult, involving struggle, He had to make his living by the sweat of his brow. Childbirth for the woman entailed pain, it was a form of labour.

God worked: that we know, from the account of creation. But did he also labour? Ignatius suggests an answer to that question. In the third point of the Contemplation for Obtaining Love in his Spiritual Exercises he asks us to contemplate how God not only gives us his gifts, not only is present within us animating us with his energy, but he also toils, labours for us. The world is broken, and making it right is a struggle. The work of Jesus who came to save us was not like that of creation: he did not simply say a word and saw that all was good. He toiled, he struggled, with disciples who did not understand what he was trying to do, with many people who preferred the world to remain broken. He was put to death.

In our own lives we are to enjoy leisure, do work which is fulfilling and creative, but we are also to labour. That is our destiny since the fall of Adam. Jesus shared that destiny, and he bids us follow him in his labour, become his companions, suffer the difficulties and the hardships of the lengthy work of completing redemption. This labour is not in vain. We will be called to rest from this labour and enjoy its reward.