



The New Epistle

a newsletter of

The Progressive Episcopal Church

Volume IV Number 6

September 2018



"Synaxis of the Archangel Michael"

19th cent. Eastern Orthodox, artist unknown

Feast Day -- September 29

LABOR DAY

Labor Day is called the "unofficial end of summer" because it marks the end of the cultural summer season. Many take their two-week vacations during the two weeks ending Labor Day weekend. Many fall activities, such as school and sports begin about this time.

In the United States, many school districts resume classes around the Labor Day holiday weekend. Many begin the week before, making Labor Day weekend the first three-day weekend of the school calendar, while others return the Tuesday following Labor Day, allowing families one final getaway before the school year begins. Many districts across the Midwest are opting to begin school after Labor Day.

Labor Day in the United States was established to celebrate labor as trade union and labor movements were growing in the 19th century. There are two theories as to the origin of the holiday. From Wikipedia:

According to one early history of Labor Day, the event originated in connection with a General Assembly of the Knights of Labor convened in New York City in September 1882. In connection with this clandestine Knights assembly, a public parade of various labor organizations was held on September 5 under the auspices of the Central Labor Union (CLU) of New York. Secretary of the CLU Matthew Maguire is credited for first proposing that a national Labor Day holiday subsequently be held on the first Monday of each September in the aftermath of this successful public demonstration..

An alternative thesis is maintained that the idea of Labor Day was the brainchild of Peter J. McGuire, a vice president of the American Federation of Labor, who put forward the initial proposal in the spring of 1882. According to McGuire, on May 8, 1882, he made a proposition to the fledgling Central Labor Union in New York City that a day be set aside for a "general holiday for the laboring classes". According to McGuire he further recommended that the event should begin with a street parade as a public demonstration of organized labor's solidarity and strength, with the march followed by a picnic, to which participating local unions could sell tickets as a fundraiser. According to McGuire he suggested the first Monday in September as an ideal date for such a public celebration, owing to optimum weather and the date's place on the calendar, sitting midway between the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving public holidays.

As people of faith, we are called to spiritual and also physical labor in service to our human family. There are many around us – family, friends, and strangers – who may be in need of spiritual or emotional guidance. There are others who need our physical assistance in things like transportation, house-cleaning, yardwork, laundry, and a host of other things. Nearly every day (especially for those who spend time on Facebook!) there is opportunity to offer encouraging words and prayer for someone who is in need is support. It is part of how we not only follow the Great Commandment, but also how we are actively seeking to BE the Living Body of Christ in the world.

This hymn text by Presbyterian hymnwriter Michael Morgan makes a wonderful weekly (even daily!) meditation or prayer. May we make it our rule of life!

(con't on next page)

HYMN FOR LABOR DAY

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1. All our work and all our being
Come from you, most gracious Lord,
Ev'ry task which lies before us
Is Creator's will outpoured.
Help us as we build your kingdom,
Know we labor not in vain;
Give us sure and deep conviction
For the tasks that you ordain.
2. Some may nurture those who hunger,
Tend and heal the broken heart;
Set our flagging spirits dancing,
Spark our vision through their art.
Others teach and offer counsel,
Bear life's burdens, ease with care;
Strive for justice, peace, and freedom
For all people everywhere.
3. Let us labor in the knowledge
That no task can be too small;
That the God who stretched the heavens
No less shaped the least of all.
Give us strength, Lord to accomplish
What you set our hands to do,
That by serving those around us,
We return the gift to you.

Work is love made visible.

-- Khalil Gibran

Joan Chittister, O.S.B. is a Roman Catholic Benedictine nun quoted Gibran in an essay she wrote. She continued:

“A spirituality of work is based on a heightened sense of sacramentality, of the idea that everything that is, is holy and that our hands consecrate it to the service of God. When we grow radishes in a small container in a city apartment, we participate in creation. When we sweep the street in front of a house, we bring new order to the universe. When we repair what has been broken or paint what is old or give away what we have earned that is above and beyond our own sustenance, we stoop down and scoop up the earth and breathe into it new life again. When we compost garbage and recycle cans, when we clean a room and put coasters under glasses, when we care for everything we touch and touch it reverently, we become the creators of a new universe. Then we sanctify our work and our work sanctifies us. A spirituality of work puts us in touch with our own creativity. Making a salad for supper becomes a work of art. Planting another evergreen tree becomes our contribution to the health of the world. Organizing a good meeting with important questions for the sake of preserving the best in human values enhances humanity. Work enables us to put our personal stamp of approval, our own watermark, the autograph of our souls on the development of the world. In fact, to do less is to do nothing at all. A spirituality of work draws us out of ourselves and, at the same time, makes us more of what we are meant to be. Good work — work done with good intentions and good effects, work that up builds the human race rather than reduces it to the monstrous or risks its destruction — develops qualities of compassion and character in me. My work also develops everything around it. There is nothing I do that does not affect the world in which I live. In developing a spirituality of work, I learn to trust beyond reason that good work will gain good things for the world, even when I don't expect them and I can't see them. In that way, I gain myself. Literally. I come into possession of a me that is worthwhile, whose life has not been in vain, who has been a valuable member of the human race. Finally, a spirituality of work immerses me in the search for human community. I begin to see that everything I do, everything, has some effect on someone somewhere. I begin to see my life tied up in theirs. I begin to see that the starving starve because someone is not working hard enough to feed them. And so I do. It becomes obvious, then, that the poor are poor because someone is not intent on the just distribution of goods of the earth. And so I am. I begin to realize that work is the lifelong process of personal sanctification that is satisfied only for the globe. I finally come to know that my work is God's work, unfinished by God because God meant it to be finished by me.”

Chittister's view of work as an expression of our love, reminds me that the LOVE that we call God, finds expression in the work that we do. Indeed, the LOVE that IS God works in, with, through, and beyond us. May we always remember and honour the sacred work that has nourished, grounded, and sustained us in the blessed lives that we lead. May we honour the sacred workers who have provided a means for LOVE to find expression in the world. May we all find work that gives expression to our love for the world, our love for one another, and our love for our neighbours. Work is indeed LOVE made visible. LOVE is the source, and ground of our being.

St Michael and All Angels

29 SEPTEMBER

This month's cover shows a 19th-century Eastern Orthodox Church icon of St Michael and the Archangels, painted by an unknown artist. The Seven Archangels depicted in the icon are, from left to right: Jegudiel, Gabriel, Selaphiel, Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Barachiel. Beneath the mandorla of Christ Emmanuel are representations of Cherubim (in blue) and Seraphim (in red).

From Wikipedia --

The most notable reference to a group of seven Archangels comes from the Bible in the biblical deuterocanonical Book of Tobit when Archangel Raphael reveals himself, declaring: "I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand in the glorious presence of the Lord, ready to serve him." (Tobit 12:15) The other two archangels mentioned by name in the Bible are Michael and Gabriel. The four names of the other archangels come from tradition.

One such tradition comes from the Old Testament Jewish apocrypha, namely the third century BCE Book of the Watchers, which at some point was merged with some other books in what is known today as 1 Enoch (the Book of Enoch), and was made part of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's scriptural canon, although by the seventh century it was rejected by Christian leaders from all other denominations as canonical scripture, and despite having been prevalent in Jewish and early Christian apostolic traditions (as well as the early Christian leaders writings) the book just fell from academic and religious status in regards to the rest of the canonical scripture, resulting in the text not being found in most parts of the world, as it was forbidden, from 7th century AD onwards. The list of angels survived only as part of oral traditions that differed to one another depending on the geographical area that they were present, and thus many different lists of angels (termed "archangel") exist, but to different levels of acceptance.

In all of the scriptures from Judeo-Christian traditions, only Michael is called "The Archangel" (Biblical Greek: Μιχαήλ ὁ ἀρχάγγελος) by Jude the Apostle in the epistle attributed to his authorship; And in the Book of Enoch, the Jewish traditions make him "one of the Archangels", although none of the others is referred to as by name. In most Protestant Christian oral traditions only Michael and Gabriel are referred to as "archangels", which echoes the most mainstream Muslim view on the subject, whereas in the Roman Catholic Christian traditions Raphael is also included, resulting in a group of three.

The Jewish people borrowed the names for angels from the Babylonian culture, which under the dualistic influence of Zoroastrianism, and as an addition to its own development of early Mesopotamian belief systems, had resulted in a folklore and cosmology that centered around the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representation of stars and planets, in which it was later introduced the same concept for star constellations, whose characteristics and names were imported by notable Jewish prophets[citation needed] during their forced exile known as the Babylonian captivity starting in 605 BCE, first with the prophet Daniel, then later with authors such as Ezekiel who styled the Babylonian constellations (the abstract forms of the constellations), that were held as "sons of the gods" (the four sons of the Sky Father deity in Babylonia that carried the Winged Sun, the throne of the Wisdom), as angels from the Lord of Israel, in fact living animals in the heaven that were

referred to as cherubim, and with that he repurposed some of the characters found in the Mesopotamian polytheistic belief system as angelic servants of the Lord of Israel, thus establishing the prevalence of the God of Israel. The 2 BC Book of the Parables, chapter XL, echoes such folkloric representations, and gives the name of the four angels with whom the Ancient of Days comes, the ones standing before the Lord of Spirits, "the voices of those upon the four sides magnifying the Lord of Glory" as: Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Phanuel.

From the Book of the Watchers chapter IX, a list of group of angels is given, in this case, the ones who saw the quantity of blood which was shed on earth in account of the transgression of the "sons of the gods", a group of rogue celestial spirits, termed "the Watchers", that arrived to earth during the antediluvian times, and it is given as a group of five that interceded on behalf of humankind to the Most High: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. Whereas the most popular tradition was borrowed from chapter XX, in which a list of "seven angels who watch" is given as: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sarakiel, Gabriel, and Remiel.

The earliest specific Christian references are in the late 5th to early 6th century: Pseudo-Dionysius gives them as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Camael, Jophiel, and Zadkiel. Pope Saint Gregory I lists them as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel (or Anael), Simiel, Oriphiel, and Raguel.

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There are traditionally four "quarter days" in a year (Lady Day (25th March), Midsummer (24th June), Michaelmas (29th September) and Christmas (25th December)). They are spaced three months apart, on religious festivals, usually close to the solstices or equinoxes. They were the four dates on which servants were hired, rents due or leases begun. It used to be said that harvest had to be completed by Michaelmas, almost like the marking of the end of the productive season and the beginning of the new cycle of farming. It was the time at which new servants were hired or land was exchanged and debts were paid. This is how it came to be for Michaelmas to be the time for electing magistrates and also the beginning of legal and university terms.

Traditionally, in the British Isles, a well fattened goose, fed on the stubble from the fields after the harvest, is eaten to protect against financial need in the family for the next year; and as the saying goes:

*"Eat a goose on Michaelmas Day,
Want not for money all the year".*

Sometimes the day was also known as "Goose Day" and goose fairs were held. Even now, the famous Nottingham Goose Fair is still held on or around the 3rd of October. Part of the reason goose is eaten is that it was said that when Queen Elizabeth I heard of the defeat of the Armada, she was dining on goose and resolved to eat it on Michaelmas Day.



A Michaelmas goose.



“THANK YOU”

A Short Sermon on Luke 17:11-19

Rt. Rev. Thurlow B Weed IV

We heard read the familiar story that Luke records for us in his Gospel concerning Jesus and ten men who are sick with leprosy. They and Jesus happen to meet, and what happens then is told by Luke.

At the beginning of the story, the ten lepers are united. At the end of the story they are divided.

At the start they are united by their trouble. They all have leprosy – a disease that eats away the body, causes severe disfigurement, and is a terrible thing.

A trouble that is shared by several people has a way of bringing people together, causing them to be united in their common struggle against whatever the trouble is. It may be only a temporary unity, lasting until the trouble is over, but a shared trouble brings about unity.

When we first see the ten men they are standing together some distance away from Jesus. It was required to stay away so as to avoid transmitting the disease to other people.

Standing together – and together they lift up their voices to Jesus – ten voices sounding as one: “Master, have mercy on us!”

They are unified in their request – all ten ask for the same thing – mercy. All ten recognize and acknowledge Christ’s power – they call him Master.

Now of these ten men, nine were Jews, and one was a Samaritan. The Jews despised the Samaritans, because they were a different race. The Jews considered themselves superior to the Samaritans. A modern comparison would be how we see Hispanics and Blacks are so often treated by white men. Racial inequality is nothing new.

But Jesus gives the same command to all ten: Go to the priests and show yourselves – and while they are in the process of obeying the command, they are healed, all ten.

They asked – and they received.

They would not have received if they had not asked.

What about us? If we are to receive, we are to ask.

Jesus did not heal them instantly. He first told them to do something. The point here is that they obeyed his commandment, and while they were in the middle of obeying it they received the thing they asked for – healing.

And so it is with us.

Jesus’ command to us is “come unto me.”

It is “Love your enemies.”

It is “Take up your cross and follow me.”

When we obey the command of Jesus, we will very often find that while we are in the process of obedience, the blessing will be upon us.

The blessing will be upon us BEFORE we get to the priests, as happened with them.

But: no obedience, no blessing.

All ten obeyed, all ten were healed.

And now we come to the central point of the story; here is where the unity of the ten men breaks down.

The Samaritan – the outcast, the man of the wrong race – discovered that --- he was HEALED!

And he rushed back to where Jesus was, and glorified God. With a loud voice! He shouted! The chances are that he used the word “Hallelujah.” Hallelujah is a Hebrew word that means “Praise God!”

So he comes running to Jesus, shouting, “Hallelujah, hallelujah!” and throws himself down at Jesus’ feet, and thanked Jesus for what he had done. “Thank you, Jesus!” “Hallelujah!”

This one man responded to the blessing he received by praising God and thanking Jesus. How wonderful it was!!

But – “Were there not ten of you who were healed of your leprosy? Were there not ten?” And here you can see Jesus lifting his eyes from the Samaritan on the ground at his feet, and looking toward the bystanders who were watching all this.

“But where are the other nine men?” Not one of them had come back to give glory to God for the great blessing he has received. Not one has come back to thank God for the healing of an incurable disease. Only this one has done so -- and he was not even a Jew But a Samaritan!

And then Jesus again looks down at him, there at his feet. “Get up. Go about your business. You have received the blessing. Return to life. Your faith has healed you.”

All of us are somewhere in that story.

We may happen to be the bystanders, those who do not bother to ask Jesus for a blessing. Maybe we are just in the audience, watching everything happen, but taking no part in what is happening. ---- I hope not.

Or we may be represented by the ungrateful nine – healed, but not bothering to thank the Healer. --- I also hope not.

Or by the grace of God, perhaps that thankful Samaritan represents us – I hope so! I hope that we are all properly grateful to our God in his Son Jesus for the healing of the soul that he gives us --- as well as for the daily miracles of air to breathe, and food to eat. I hope and pray that we are all grateful.

To close, here is something to think about.

I suspect that in a certain way we are seen in this story in all ten men. We are not JUST the one who was thankful, we are not JUST the ungrateful nine – we are ALL TEN OF THEM.

Here is what I mean. The Samaritan came back and thanked Jesus. WE know, much better than he did, that he was thanking God as he was thanking Jesus.

But HE was seeing the human being before him. The man Jesus. The Samaritan thanked the man who had healed him.

We short-change ourselves if we give thanks to our God ONLY. We short-change other people, and in effect we violate Christ's own commandment to love one another.

Our thanksgiving must begin with thanking Almighty God. But it should not stop there. It must spread out to all of our human family.

We should thank each other.

And here is where I think we are represented by all ten of these healed lepers.

Nine-tenths of them did not thank Jesus. One-tenth of them did.

Nine-tenths of the time we neglect to thank other people.

Maybe one-tenth of the time do we make the effort to go to someone and say, "thank you."

It means that nine-tenths of the time we are cheating those people, cheating ourselves, and disobeying Christ's commandment. We take each other too much for granted.

So what I say to you, what I say to myself, is this: go out of your way to THANK SOMEONE FOR SOMETHING. Thank at least one person for something.

You won't have to think very hard to find your reasons. Thank your spouse for being tolerant with you. Thank your parent for loving you. Thank your child for being sweet. Thank your neighbor --- the possibilities are endless. Especially, thank someone you generally take for granted.

Don't stop at one person. Spread it out!

Let it become a way of life ... that we can thank God for making us into people who are able to say ... "THANK YOU" not only to him but to our neighbor as well. AMEN.