

# 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Labor Day – September 1 & 2, 2018 – Reflection

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“Be doers of the word and not hearers only ... religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

(The Letter of James)

Nowadays, when little kids play soccer or T-ball or basketball or hockey, as they swarm to the puck or the ball or stand in the field waving or picking daisies, parents look at their offspring with a measure of pride and bemusement. There are no winners or losers, there are no standings or rankings, scores are not kept, statistics are not compiled. The games are not serious or competitive. The goal is to have fun, gain confidence and so, every child gets the medal, the trophy, the adulation.

I can assure you, though, that when the child grows older, when the games count, when tryouts take place and cuts to rosters are made, all is not just for the fun of it, or to smell the flowers. Competition changes things, ramps up the stakes.

Having played hockey for much of my life, even on the pickup level or in the beer leagues, there's still competition; scores are kept, records matter; and sometimes the sportsmanship can get a little chippy. That even carries over to the locker room where guys razz each other about everything under the sun: looks; weight; age; relationships; smarts; ability ... you name it. One of the main areas that often comes up is

jobs and how hard or not someone works. For years , after guys have learned that I'm a priest, I come in for some good-natured scorn that goes something like, "Hey Padre, what's it like to be able to work only one hour a week??!!"

One hour a week ... in his letter to the Church, St. James wondered the same thing I think. To call oneself a follower of Christ and yet to give to the Lord in the Body of Christ one hour a week in worship at Mass is not living the Gospel, practicing the Christian faith. James tells us that when we claim to be Christians, talk can be cheap. It's by your works that you prove your mettle.

What are the works that put us really on Christ's team? James seems to put them into two categories: charity and morality: "to care for orphans and widows ... and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

The Christian Church coaches us in this by spelling out for us what living the charitable and moral life might look like. The loving Christian would practice some of the Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; shelter the homeless; visit the sick; visit the imprisoned; bury the dead. And, the moral Christian would strive to perfect the Spiritual Works of Mercy: counsel the doubtful; instruct the ignorant; admonish the sinner (especially if that sinner happens to be you!); comfort the sorrowful; forgive injuries; bear wrongs patiently; pray for the living and the dead.

Labor Day is a civic holiday in our country, but this weekend might be a very good time for each of us who claims to be a friend of Jesus, who calls oneself a Catholic to look at the quality of the work we do. Are my locker room buddies right when they point out that I only work one hour a week or do I believe and show with my actions that faith is

really a full-time job for as St. James warns us so-called Christians,  
"Faith without works is dead!"