

Tomorrow, of course, is Labor Day, although it is not a recognized as such on the Church's liturgical calendar. Still, I suppose that fact is uppermost in many people's minds today. In the 30 years that I worked as a teacher and administrator in Catholic high schools, Labor Day was always significant because it usually meant that the gloriously long summer vacation was coming to an end and that my days of staying up until the wee small hours watching violent sexy horror movies on cable and sleeping in till 9 a.m. were about to come to end and that I'd soon have to give up the theatrical bright lights of Boise and the Idaho Shakespeare Festival in order to return to the thrill-a-minute work of discussing Ernest Hemingway with disinterested 16 year olds. This morning I can think can bring most of that together, except for Ernest Hemingway, who never really interested me much either along with today's Gospel to

identify how today's readings can help us understand Labor Day.

Unfortunately, my association with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival ended in around 1993, when I performed in my fifth and final summer season as an actor there. I continued as an actor in Portland after that, playing both Shakespearean and musical roles like Arthur in CAMELOT and Henry Higgins in MY FAIR LADY until 2014 when I was playing Shakespeare's King Lear and the stroke that left me moving like something lurching out of a German castle with bolts in its neck put an end to all that folderol. I have tried to resurrect myself as an actor on the many great white ways of Spokane, but my success has been limited. Still, I am currently in rehearsals for a production of MACBETH that will go on in October in Spokane. Back when I had two good arms and legs and could give a good account of myself with a broadsword, I played Macbeth.

Now, I'm reduced to playing Duncan, the old king of Scotland whom Macbeth knocks off so that he can seize his crown. Working on this production has reminded me of some of the basics of acting. The great English playwright Noel Coward said that the keys to good acting were "Know your lines," "speak clearly," and "don't bump into the other actors," but I think it's a bit more complex than that. When I'm playing or directing a scene, I try to identify and focus on characters' "objectives." I ask, "What does Macbeth WANT in this scene?" As an actor, I then do what I think Macbeth would do to achieve that objective—Ideally without bumping into any other actors—because I discovered that if I did anything like that to Lady Macbeth she would bite me when she slipped in some unrehearsed kisses. Acting isn't about pretending to be mad, or happy or sad, or in the case of my Cleopatra pretending that she loved Mark Antony even though she couldn't

stand ME. It's about having clearly identified "Objectives" and doing things that lead toward the achievement of those objectives.

But enough about acting. What about Labor Day? Where did that come from? Of course, everybody know how *Fathers' Day* was invented: Fathers' day was invented in 1910 at the YMCA in Spokane, Washington. After hearing a sermon about Mothers' Day at the Central Methodist Church in Spokane, a seven-year-old girl named Sonora Smart Dodd whose father was a Civil War veteran who had raised six children as a widower decided that Fathers deserved their own day of recognition, so she went to a group called the Spokane Ministerial Alliance and asked them to support the institution of a day honoring fathers. The first Fathers' Day celebration took place at the Spokane YMCA on June 19, 1910. Ms. Dodd has passed on, but she was honored at EXPO 74 for her efforts on behalf of fathers. Labor Day

is a little older. It dates back to 1887, the year Gonzaga U and Gonzaga Prep were founded, when the Central Labor Union of the United States and the Knights of Labor succeeded in organizing a large parade in New York City's Union Square to honor the efforts of working people and their contributions to the economic strength of the United States. The Central Labor Union was an organization of skilled and unskilled workers which included both male and female members and was racially integrated across color lines. The Knights of labor was a larger organization which was similarly integrated but which unfortunately sometimes violently opposed the immigration of Asian workers whom they considered a threat. Throughout the Industrial Revolution in the United States, both these groups worked to protect workers against exploitation and mistreatment through efforts such as the Great SouthWestern railroad of 886 in which 200,00

workers in five states struck the Union Pacific and Missouri Pacific Railroads. Nearly a dozen strikers were killed by Federal Marshalls and hired strike breakers, but the workers demonstrated that the rail system on which the economy had come to depend could not function without them. If I could sing like Paul Robeson, I'd regale you with a few verses of the song "Joe Hill" now—to remind us all of Joe Hill, who tried to organize Utah copper miners into a union, I won't try to sing it, but the song says, "The copper bosses killed you, Joe, they shot you, Joe, says I They framed you on a murder charge. 'Takes more than guns to kill a man, says Joe, "I didn't die.'

And now how do we tie all that back to the readings and Shakespearean acting? I think it's pretty easy, but then I thought directing a version of Shakespeare's COMEDY OF ERRORS set in the Wild West with a cast of

high school kids would be easy. In the Second reading from the Letter of James, we get a very clear statement of what our “objective” as Christians should be: “Be doers of the Word, not just hearers,” James says. Our objective should be to act on what we say believe by caring for the vulnerable and disenfranchised—for widows and orphans and all those who have no one else to care for them. Jesus’ criticism of the punctilious legalism of the Pharisees reminds of this same objective payattention to great commandment (which Jesus said was to love others as ourselves and not to allow purely human values and concerns to usurp the places of more significant and more truly divine objectives in our thoughts.

During the Great SouthWestern Railroad strike,the Robber baron railroad tycoon was rumored to have boasted that he could hire half of the American working class to shoot the other

half.” But apparently Jay Gould never made today’s responsorial Psalm: “The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.” His Objective.