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It was extolled by the songwriters of the beat generation. It was glamorised in films like Easy Rider or Midnight Cowboy. It was the in-thing among the Sixties generation – a guitar, a motorbike, an open road, a couple riding into the sunset. It was a dropout's paradise. The thing which it extolled would seem to be none other than the old fashioned sin of sloth, a member of the Group known as the Seven Deadly Sins. It may be last on the list but it's by no means the least.

Some people blame others and situations for the lack of opportunity in their lives, but when the gospel says “seek and you shall find”, might that not also refer to work?

*Hall Roach, the Irish comedian, in one of his one-liners, talks about this unemployed Dublin chap who when he heard mention of the word Manual Labour thought it was the Spanish ambassador. **Ha, Ha Ha.***

The devil finds work for idle hands. Those who shirk work often “reap what they did not sow”. Children should play their part in home chores or they might grow up thinking world owes them something.

It was once fondly thought that modern technology by shortening working hours, would leave us free to explore other talents in our arsenal. Evidence suggests, however, that most of us, when we are free, prefer to idle our time away. The old protestant work ethic has a lot going for it. As children, are we ready to help out with household chores without always having to be asked? Being glued to the telly or smart phones all day can lead to indiscipline and laziness.

Of course we might be inclined to let ourselves 'off the hook' and say we're always on the go, but could it be just 'chasing our tail'? “Work is made for man, not man for work”. Workaholics often use work as an escape route from spending more time with their family. We may be fed up of Covid19 but it can enhance family solidarity if taken in the right spirit. Is God telling us something? Family life is under attack more than ever.

Psychologists tell us that most of us use only a fraction of our potential. Some beat a hasty retreat from anything which might help them develop their potential in other fields. They couldn't be bothered. Laziness often finds its home in illusion, or a fantasy world far removed from reality. Work is good for man and we should take pride in it. St Paul went even so far as to say, 'if any man will not work, neither let him eat'. The talents which God has given us are not meant to lie fallow as we heard from today's gospel.

Some people mistakenly equate being talented with intellectual prowess. I remember a boy in our class who struggled with the three R's but when he left school at 14 could strip down a tractor engine in double quick time and put it back together again without any manual of instructions. We were amazed at his knowledge of engines in general without ever going to technical college. Talents come in all shapes and sizes.

We should tell people the gifts we think they have and encourage them to use them. No one need stand empty-handed before the Lord on the Day of Reckoning.