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It was extolled by the songwriters of the sixties generation. It was glamorised in films like Easy Rider or Midnight Cowboy - a guitar, a motorbike, an open road, a couple riding into the sunset but in reality going nowhere. 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.

Today's gospel reminds us that the gift of life is precious and there are consequences for wasting it. Some people blame others and situations for the lack of opportunity but when the gospel says "seek and you shall find", might that not refer to work as well as other things? Hall Roach, the Irish comedian, talks about this unemployed chap in Dublin who thought that Manual Labour was the Spanish ambassador. The devil finds work for idle hands.

It was once fondly hoped that modern technology when 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 do nothing or just watch telly. The old protestant work ethic has a lot going for it, and the earlier in life we adopt it the better. As children, do we regularly tidy our bedrooms or help out with other household chores without having to be asked? Watching too much telly or being constantly on your smart phone is not good for you.

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'? Using talents is more people orientated than task driven.

As Pope John Paul said "work is made for man, not man for work". If I am a teacher it is because I love the children and want them to discover their uniqueness as persons. I am not primarily driven by league tables, or targets, or my own self-interest. If I am in business, do I put people before profit?

Psychologists tell us that most of us use only a fraction of our potential. Some beat a hasty retreat from anything which might extend or challenge them to move out of their comfort zone. Work

is good for man and we should take pride in it. The talents which God has given us are not meant to lie fallow.

Some people mistakenly equate being talented with being academically bright. I remember a boy in our class who struggled to read and write but when he left school at 14 he 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 without the help of books.

Talents come in all shapes and sizes. They may at first be hidden but are there to be discovered and used. We must not let fear or apathy or discouragement get in the way of us succeeding. No one need stand empty-handed before the Lord on the Day of Reckoning.