
Labor Day Should Be Called Rigor Day

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

Our children have been in school for three or four weeks now, and already it seems to be vacation time. It's Labor Day! The first holiday of the school season for children, and the last gasp of summer vacation freedom for adults!

But, what exactly are we supposed to be observing on "Labor Day?" We haven't really been laboring long enough lately to take a day off. If it is a quick vacation for our children, who have only just tasted a couple of introductory weeks at school, what is it that we should observe with them?

I propose that we observe Rigor Day. Labor Day should be a reminder that the good life involves rigor and commitment and discipline. Those are not burdensome ways of living; they are what make living worthwhile!

Schools teach us many things, and most of them are good. Even with new theories of learning, we do learn facts, and that goal should never be denigrated! But we also learn how to learn. We learn process. We also learn socialization and how to get along. We learn how other people think and how to work with those other ways of thinking. What a challenge!

But I also hope our children learn, and I hope that we learn, something about rigor. I have just read a review (but not the book!) of "The Smartest Kids in the World," a new book by Amanda Ripley ([New York Times Book Review, 25 August 2013](#)), which tries to distinguish why some countries educate students so much more effectively than does the United States. She writes that Americans need a culture of rigor, and they haven't gotten it.

I think she is right that we, all of us, need rigor. By rigor, I mean something about discipline. The key to learning, and maybe the key to a good life, is rigor: how to give oneself to the task at hand, how to apply energy and commitment, how to persevere at something we love.

There is much talk about "privilege" these days, and I hear two sorts of conversations. In the first case are "privileged" persons, and children, who are unaware of their status and who naively ignore what it means to work, what it means to have discipline, what it means to go about life with rigor. They are so blithely oblivious to the luxuries that life has offered to them, that they actually feel "entitled" to those privileges.

So it is, of course, that many upper class parents try to have honest conversations with their children, acknowledging, as best they can, how they enjoy so many benefits of life simply because of how they were born and where they live. One could make the case that most Americans enjoy this kind of privilege, relative to the rest of the world, no matter how they compare with other Americans on the other side of town. Though "privileged" can be thrown about as an accusation, it can also be a humble acknowledgement that "to whom much is given, much will be required."

The other sort of "privilege" is the stereotype that society equates with "entitlement." At the opposite end of the economic spectrum from the first sort of "privilege" is this second type, whereby citizens claim that their social standing is a "lower"

one” entitles them to special treatment by society as a whole. When parents and children too easily claim this identity, they actually risk the same damage as the upper class privileged folks: losing the benefits of discipline and rigor.

The academic year and the church program year have both just begun. It's not time to rest from, or to celebrate, our labors. It is time to commit to rigor. May this year bring us the joy of rigor, the joy of discipleship, the good life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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