



Opus [01]

A Spirituality of Work

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For an elaboration,
see <https://www.a-z.ctn.sg/post/opus-01>



What you think about work determines *why, where* and *how* you work, and the extent to which you become holy and fulfil your vocation.

Opening Prayer – Extracts from the inaugural Sermon of Pope John Paul II

“The absolute and yet sweet and gentle power of the Lord responds to the whole depths of the human person, to his loftiest aspirations of intellect, will and heart. It does not speak the language of force but expresses itself in charity and truth...

... Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the Pope and all those who wish to serve Christ and with Christ's power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows ‘what is in man’. He alone knows it.

Opening Prayer – Extracts from the inaugural Sermon of Pope John Paul II

... We ask you therefore, we beg you with humility and trust, let Christ speak to man. He alone has words of life, yes, of eternal life.”
In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

1. The Purpose and Dignity of Work

Are Singaporeans overworked?

*As Catholics in Singapore,
do you have a spirituality of work that you are aware of?*

1. The Purpose and Dignity of Work

1.1 Work is a Calling, a Mandate to Continue God's Work of Creation

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”

Genesis 2:15

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Genesis 1:26-28

“It is clear from the very first pages of the Bible that work is an essential part of human dignity”.

**Pope Francis, *The Joy Of Love*
(*Amoris Laetitia*), at 23
(referring to Genesis 2:15)**

“Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another.”

CCC, 2427

Applies to All Types Of Work

- Paid or volunteered
- In the corporate world or in the Church
- At home or in school
- Humble or “exalted”
- Young or old
- Manager or staff
- Blue or white collared
- Manual or intellectual
- Publicly admired or privately done
- In “*the most ordinary everyday activities*” (*Laborem Exercens*, 25)
- “[t]his mandate concerns the whole of everyday activity as well” (*Gaudium et Spes* at 34)

"The First Labours of Adam and Eve" by Alonso Cano (1601–1667).

Adam is seen tilling the ground with Eve spinning at the background.

1. The Purpose and Dignity of Work

1.2 Work is a Duty, and Honours Our Gifts and Talents Received from God

Work is a *duty*
(CCC, 2427; *Laborem Exercens*, 16).

St. Paul commanded the Thessalonians that “If any one will not work, let him not eat.” (**2 Thess 3:10**), and charged them “to work with your hands” (**1 Thess 4:11**).

“Work honors the Creator’s gifts and the talents
received from him”

CCC, 2427

1. The Purpose and Dignity of Work

1.3 Work to Provide for Ourselves and Others

Work is meant to provide for *ourselves* and *our family*.

Work is also to serve the needs of *others*.

“... he who labours ought to do so, not that he may serve his own needs but that he may be able to fulfil the command of the Lord Who said: *I was hungry, and you gave me to eat...*

Each one therefore, in undertaking any task, should have this purpose in mind: **to serve the need of others**, not his own ends.

... But he who strives after perfection, let him work day and night, *that he may have something to give to him that suffereth need.*”

St. Basil the Great, Sermon on “Christian Labour”

A Kingdom-centred view of money.

Where we work *in order*
to have enough to give regularly and generously.

(see “F” for Finances for an elaboration)

1. The Purpose and Dignity of Work

1.4 Work is for Man, Not Man for Work

“Work is for man, not man for work.”

CCC, 2428

“[Human work] ... must leave room for man to prepare himself, by becoming more and more what in the will of God he ought to be, for the ‘rest’ that the Lord reserves for his servants and friends.”

Pope St. John Paul II (in *Laborem Exercens*, 25)

Finding the right balance may require, in some cases,
a form of *voluntary* or *spiritual* poverty.

1. The Purpose and Dignity of Work

1.5 A Word of Encouragement for those Faced with Unemployment or Job Loss

The Church stands in solidarity with and shares the pain of those faced with unemployment, under-employment or job loss, and calls for societies and States to collaborate to ensure suitable employment for all who are capable of it.

2. The Effects of Sanctified Work on Ourselves, Others and the World

2. The Effects of Sanctified Work on Ourselves, Others and the World

2.1 Work Makes Us Holy and is Redemptive

Work “can be a means of sanctification”

CCC, 2427

*Work helps us become holy, in response to the universal
call to holiness*

“To love and serve God, there is no need to do anything strange or unusual. Christ bids all men without exception to be perfect as His heavenly Father is perfect. Sanctity, for the vast majority of men, implies sanctifying their work, sanctifying themselves in it, and sanctifying others through it. Thus they can encounter God in the course of their daily lives.”

St. Josemaria Escriva

Work “can also be redemptive”

“By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, *man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work.* He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish.”

CCC, 2427



"The Youth of Jesus" by James Tissot (French, 1836-1902).

By assuming human nature, Christ sanctifies and elevates human nature itself, such that, there is no aspect of human life that cannot be transformed into an act of offering to the Father, including work.

2. The Effects of Sanctified Work on Ourselves, Others and the World

2.2 Work is a Critical Path to Develop Ourselves and
Fulfil Our Vocation

“For when a man works he not only alters things and society, *he develops himself as well*. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. *A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has.*

... [This allows...] men as individuals and as members of society to *pursue their total vocation and fulfil it.*”

(*Gaudium et Spes* at 35)

“In work, the person exercises and
fulfils in part the potential inscribed in his nature”

CCC, 2428

“For we are his workmanship,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand,
that we should walk in them”

(Ephesians 2:10)

“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work.”

St. John Henry Newman

2. The Effects of Sanctified Work on Ourselves, Others and the World

2.3 Work Makes Others Holy

The faithful “must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations”

(Lumen Gentium, 36).

St. Josemaria reminds us that we can *sanctify others*
through our work

What apostolic fruit are we producing with our work?

Are we bringing souls closer to God through work friendships and social dealings?

2. The Effects of Sanctified Work on Ourselves, Others and the World

2.4 Work Glorifies God and Illumines the World with the Spirit and Light of Christ

Doing our work well glorifies God

“For man, created to God’s image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him Who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. *Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth.*”

Gaudium et Spes at 34

Work is “a way of animating earthly realities
with the Spirit of Christ”

CCC, 2427

Doing our work well is our practical and tangible way of being *salt of the earth* and *light of the world*, and of bringing the Spirit of Christ and his saving light to the whole of human society.

“The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfilment of this duty”

(*Lumen Gentium*, 36)

An important form of **pre-evangelization**

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life

3. How to Sanctify Our Work

3. How to Sanctify Our Work

3.1 For Love of God, with Greatest Possible Human Perfection, and in Union with Christ

Sanctifying one's work means making holy our work by:

- Doing it for love of God;
- With the greatest possible human perfection; and
- Offering it to God in union with Christ.

A Christian should do all honest human work, be it intellectual or manual, with the greatest perfection possible:

- With *human perfection* (professional competence); and
- With *Christian perfection* (for love of God's will and as a service to mankind).

3. How to Sanctify Our Work

3.2 Pray and Delight in God Upon Rising and Before Working, and Regularly in Between

Saint Basil the Great advises us to pray *the moment we wake up, upon rising,*

“so that we may consecrate to God the first movements of the soul and of the mind, and **take no other care upon us until we have been gladdened by the thought of God**, as it is written: I remembered God, and was delighted, and was exercised, and my spirit swooned away”.

**Saint Basil the Great,
Sermon on “Christian Labour”**

St. Basil goes on to say that we should not “**apply our body to labour until we have done what is written:** To thee will I pray: O Lord, in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice. In the morning I will stand before thee, and will see”.

St. Basil also strongly recommends (and not to neglect), for “those who have given themselves to live for the praise and glory of God and of His Christ”, that we pray at *regular breaks* throughout the work day.

3. How to Sanctify Our Work

3.3 Pray as We Work, Work becoming Prayer

We should strive to turn our work into “a personal prayer... a real conversation with Our Father in heaven”.

Or as Brother Lawrence famously puts it,
to continually practice the presence of God,
throughout the day and even as we work.

4. Conclusion & Closing Prayer – Prayer before Work to St. Joseph the Worker

Closing Prayer – Prayer before Work to St. Joseph the Worker

“O Glorious Saint Joseph, model of all those who are devoted to labor, obtain for me the grace to work in a spirit of penance for the expiation of my many sins;

- to work conscientiously, putting the call of duty above my natural inclinations;
- to work with thankfulness and joy, considering it an honor to employ and develop by means of labor the gifts received from God;
- to work with order, peace, moderation, and patience, never shrinking from weariness and trials;

Closing Prayer – Prayer before Work to St. Joseph the Worker

- to work above all with purity of intention and detachment from self, keeping unceasingly before my eyes death and the account that I must give of time lost, talents unused, good omitted, and vain complacency in success, so fatal to the work of God.

All for Jesus, all through Mary, all after thy example, O Patriarch, Saint Joseph. Such shall be my watch-word in life and in death. Amen.” (*Composed by Pope St. Pius X*)



**“Saint Joseph protecteur de l’enfance de Jésus” (1874)
by Georges Becker**

Reflection/ Sharing Questions

Summary of Key Points

1. The purpose and dignity of work include the following principles:

- Work is a *calling*, a mandate to continue God's work of creation.
- Work is a *duty*, and it honours our gifts and talents received from God.
- Work to provide for ourselves and others.
- Work is for man, and not man for work.

Summary of Key Points

2. The effects of sanctified work on ourselves, others and the world include:

- Work makes us holy and is redemptive.
- Work is a critical path to develop ourselves and to fulfil our vocation.
- Work makes others holy.
- Work glorifies God and illumines the world with the Spirit and light of Christ.

Summary of Key Points

3. How to sanctify our work:

- Work for love of God, with the greatest possible human perfection, and in union with Christ.
- Pray and delight in God upon rising and before working, and regularly in between.
- Pray as we work, work becoming prayer.

Reflection Question 1

What spirituality of work, if any, did you have
before reading this article?

Reflection Question 2

With reference to the principles proposed in this article, what tangible steps will you take today to develop a spirituality of work?