



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Thank God, it's Monday!

Scott McKellar

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The “toil” of work is not God’s original plan

My title is deliberately provocative. We are all familiar with the more common expression “Thank God, it’s Friday!” We all meet people who are forced to work at jobs they find difficult or unexciting and who seem to live for the weekend. The Genesis narrative makes it clear that the addition of “toil” to human work did not occur until after the Fall. As a punishment for the disobedience of our first parents the earth itself is cursed; “Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. . . . By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat” (Genesis 3:17-19). While we may all sympathize with the person who wants to relax after a long work week, the “toil” of work is not God’s original plan.

Man’s original vocation

Earlier in the Genesis narrative we are told God created man and woman in “the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:27) and told them to fill, subdue and have dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28). We are specifically told that God placed man in the garden “to cultivate and care for it” (Genesis 2:15). Although “toil” is a result of the Fall, human work is part of man’s original vocation from God. Man is called to continue the work of creation by filling, subduing, having dominion over, cultivating and caring for creation. At the apex of creation is the call to enter into the fuller freedom of God’s Sabbath rest.

What does it mean to be created in the “image of God” and what is our vocation? The fathers of Second Vatican Council note: It is Christ who fully reveals man to himself. Pope John Paul II chose this passage from the Council as the theme of his first encyclical, *The Redeemer of Man*. As the Council reminds us, “For by His

incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart” (GS 22).

By virtue of being created in the image of God, the new Adam, man also shares in the three fold ministry of Christ as prophet, priest and king (Lumen Gentium 31).

To join our human work to Christ’s work

By his very nature man has a right and duty to work. As Paul reminds us, “If any one will not work, let him not eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Jesus endured the hardship of working as a carpenter in Nazareth. Jesus called his earthly ministry “work.” “My Father is at work until now, so I am at work” (John 5:17). Work can also be redemptive (CCC 2427). Even in our suffering we can join our human work to Christ’s work at Calvary. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Colossians 1:24).

Begin by offering up the work you already do

Work then can be a means of our personal sanctification; a means of sanctifying others and a means of bringing about the sanctification of the whole world. One modern Saint who has emphasized these ideas is St. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei.

At his canonization, Pope John Paul II called him the Saint of ordinary life. Saint Josémaría repeatedly emphasized: “you have to sanctify your work, be sanctified in your work, and sanctify through your work.” St. Josemaría noted that work is “the hinge on which our calling to holiness is fixed and turns.” (Friends of God, n. 62)

For many of us the talk of holiness and sanctity seems very out of touch with our life. We are tempted to say, “Hey, I drive a Ford. I’m just an ordinary guy!” If that is the case then this is the type of holiness for you. We can begin by offering up the work we already do. Any honest profession can be a means of holiness. We can strive to do our work well, making our daily work an offering to our Lord.

Saint Josémaría once reminded his sons, “What use is it telling me that so and so is a good son of mine — a good Christian — but a bad shoemaker? If he doesn’t try to learn his trade well, or doesn’t give his full attention to it, he won’t be able to sanctify it or offer it to Our Lord. (Friends of God, n. 62)

Finally we can try to allow Christ to live through our work. We can be honest and sincere. We can maintain cheerfulness and offer up the difficulties we face. Our daily struggle will lead us back to that workshop in Nazareth where we can seek the prayers of Mary and Joseph and turn our eyes ever more up to their Son.

By Scott McKellar, director of the Bishop Helmsing Institute