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Meditations: Wednesday of the Twentieth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 20th week of Ordinary Time.

- Work, man's initial vocation
- A new dimension
- Envious of God's generosity

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THE GOSPEL of the Mass presents us with a parable that at first sight

seems disconcerting: that of the vineyard owner who hires day laborers throughout the day and, when the time comes to pay them, surprises them by paying the same to those who have been working since early morning as to those who arrived much later (cf. *Mt* 20:1-16).

This passage has given rise to various interpretations, which emphasize different aspects. In the current context, one theme that perhaps resonates with particular force is the drama of unemployment: the situation of many people who, like these day laborers, are waiting to find work. The tragedy for these people is twofold: on the one hand, they encounter difficulties in supporting themselves and their families; on the other, their human dignity is wounded, since “work constitutes a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth.”^[1]

Work is a necessary good not only for subsistence, but above all for men

and women to fulfill themselves as persons and, through their daily work, to serve others and perfect the world, thus bringing it to God.

“Work is man’s initial vocation; it is a blessing from God, and those who consider it a punishment are sadly mistaken,”^[2] Saint Josemaría taught. For the vast majority of Christians, striving for holiness means “sanctifying one’s own work, sanctifying oneself in one’s work, and sanctifying others through one’s work.”^[3] Perhaps in our prayer we can ask ourselves how we are sanctifying our work, with the desire and commitment to do it as well as possible and offering it to God at Mass; how we are sanctifying ourselves in our work, exercising the virtues with docility to the Holy Spirit, so that He may transform us into *another Christ*; and how we sanctify others through our work, transmitting light and warmth to

those around us, with an apostolic spirit manifested in the sincere friendship we offer to each one.

FROM A HUMAN perspective, we tend to value jobs that are better paid, enjoy social prestige, or are known for their effectiveness. Also at times, perhaps not in theory but in practice, we can give work too central a place in our lives, so that our daily work invades spaces that should be dedicated to our relationship with God, our family life, or our friendships. In these situations, it may be opportune to pause and reflect: What is the ultimate meaning of my work? Am I working as God wants? What does our Lord truly value in my work?

“Man should not limit himself to material production. Work is born of

love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed towards love.”^[4] It is our love that our Lord appreciates in our work, and that can transform a seemingly insignificant job into something great and heroic. Saint Josemaría once remarked to two people tending a garden: “How well you have cared for all these plants, all these flowers... What do you think is worth more: your work or that of a member of parliament?” They remained silent, but the founder of Opus Dei continued: “It depends on the love for God that you put into it: if you put more Love than a member of parliament, then your work is worth more.”^[5]

Christians, sensing the charity poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 5:5), live filled with gratitude to God and seek to spread the love they have received around them. Working for love does not exclude other legitimate motives –

such as earning a salary, obtaining recognition, or feeling the satisfaction of a duty fulfilled – but transcends and orders them. St. Paul insists: “If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2). The same can be said of our work: when its driving force is to strive for God’s glory, that job – whether simple or complex – takes on a supernatural grandeur. What is decisive, as St. Josemaría taught, is “the effort to make human things, great or small, divine, because through Love everything acquires a new dimension.”^[6] —

THE PARABLE of the owner of the vineyard also highlights the problem of envy. The day laborers of the first hour protest against the owner’s

generosity towards those who had worked less. Jesus was speaking to certain Pharisees who thought they were in a privileged position before God; they wanted to be recognized for their works, and refused to accept that He could embrace sinners.

Instead of rejoicing in divine mercy, they perceived it as an injustice. Like the workers in the parable, they “fail to see the beauty of the landowner’s gesture, who was not unjust, but simply generous,” Leo XIV teaches.

“He looked not only at merit, but also at need. God wants to give his Kingdom, that is, full, eternal, and happy life, to everyone. And this is what Jesus does with us. He does not establish a ranking, but gives himself entirely to those who open their hearts to him.”^[7] —

Envy is one of the oldest vices presented to us in Scripture, and it produces in those who nurture it a bitter sadness that can even lead to

hatred. Cain, seeing that the Lord accepted Abel's offering with pleasure and not his own, "became greatly enraged and his face was downcast" (*Gen* 4:5). Instead of focusing his attention on all the gifts he had received as the firstborn of Adam and Eve, he could not bear to see his brother happy and winning God's favor. Consumed by this envious sadness, he rebelled and took Abel's life.

"At the root of this vice is a false idea of God: we do not accept that God has his own 'mathematics,' distinct from ours. We would like to impose our own selfish logic on God; instead, the logic of God is love. The good things he gives us are meant to be shared. This is why Saint Paul exhorts Christians: 'Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor'" (*Rom* 12:10). Here is the remedy for envy!"^[8] — We can ask our Lady to

teach us to rejoice sincerely in the gifts her Son gives to others, and to contemplate with joy the mercy He shows to all his children.

^[1] St. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, no. 4.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 482.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 55.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 48.

^[5] *Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Scepter, p. 194.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 60.

^[7] Leo XIV, Audience, 4 June 2025.

^[8] Francis, Audience, 28 February 2024.

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