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Meditations: May 1, Saint Joseph the Worker

Some reflections that can guide our prayer on the memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker.

05/01/2024

- The Holy Family's life was very normal
- Working well and serving others
- Work is ordered to love

IN THE GOSPEL for today's Mass, the memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker, we see Jesus returning to Nazareth after preaching and performing miracles in various places in Galilee. On the Sabbath He went to the synagogue and was invited to comment on the Word of God. Echoes of his miracles and healings, as well as his teaching, have reached the townspeople, so they are curious to know more about Him. But when Jesus finally begins to speak, they react with suspicion and ask: *Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?* (Mt 13:54-56).

The people of Nazareth, relying on the human security of what they already knew about Jesus, found it hard to rise to the supernatural level of faith. But this reaction shows us, among other things, how normal the life of the Holy Family was. In the

eyes of the people they were just another ordinary and hardworking family, who didn't draw attention to themselves by doing anything surprising. "What had life to offer to someone from a forgotten village like Nazareth? Nothing but work: work every day, with the same constant effort. And at the end of the day, a poor little house in which to rest and regain energy for the next day."^[1] —

Today we consider the figure of Saint Joseph, especially in his life as a worker. At first his life of humble work may not seem to have anything special about it. "But the name Joseph, in Hebrew, means 'God will add.' God adds unsuspected dimensions to the holy lives of those who do his will. He adds the one important dimension which gives meaning to everything, the divine dimension."^[2] — This was true in Joseph's life, and should also be true in ours. God has entrusted us with a

great mission hidden in the normal events of our daily lives, and He adds his grace to our humble efforts.

NAZARETH was a group of houses on the side of a small mountain, many of them partially excavated out of the rock. At most, a few hundred people may have lived there, most of whom engaged in agriculture or livestock. But there was always a need for a craftsman like Joseph, who could shape the wood for a variety of uses: for beams and doors, as well as for farm tools and household utensils.

Joseph needed to work first of all in order to support his own family. But at the same time, like each of us, he also needed work in order to live with human dignity, with the joy of having earned his bread with effort and as a co-worker with God in

developing the environment around Nazareth. Work for him was an opportunity both for personal growth and a bond of union with others.^[3] All work has a social value, by producing goods and providing services. Doing a job is always a way to help improve society, to help others and better people's living conditions. In short, work is an expression of God's care for each person. "Work is the continuation of God's work. Human work is the vocation of man received from God at the end of the creation of the universe."^[4] Naturally, for work to acquire this value, it needs to be well done, carried out with a spirit of self-giving and service to others.

Our work "should have a feature which was basic to Saint Joseph's work and should be so for every Christian: the spirit of service, the desire to contribute to the well-being of other people. Joseph's work was

not self-centered, even though his life of hard work made him a strong and forceful personality. When he worked, he was aware that he was carrying out God's will; he was thinking of his people, of Jesus and Mary, and of everyone in Nazareth . . . His skilled work was in the service of others, to brighten the lives of other families in the town; and with a smile, a friendly word, a passing remark, he would restore confidence and happiness to those in danger of losing them.”^[5]

ALTHOUGH JOSEPH found life with Jesus and Mary a marvelous experience, this didn't spare him from the inevitable hardships of life. Like everyone else he sensed his strength diminishing as he grew older; frictions would have arisen from time to time with his neighbors,

and perhaps he had to confront financial difficulties, with customers unable to pay what they rightfully owed for his work.... But it was this ordinary daily life, with all its joys and its difficulties, that Saint Joseph was called to sanctify.

Nothing that Saint Joseph made with his own hands has been preserved for us. Nevertheless, the love he put into that work is still bearing fruit. “Work should not simply be a question of producing things, of making objects. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed towards love.”^[6] His love for Jesus and Mary impelled him to work intensely. His love manifested itself, almost unconsciously, in the effort and care he put into doing things well. And that same immense love, with his unity of life, reminded him constantly that his daily work was ordered to the mission God had entrusted to him. In our own life, is it

love for God and other men and women that impels us to work hard and well, with order, finishing the small details, working with concentration and intensity? Do we turn our work into prayer, offering it to our Lord during the Holy Mass? Do we realize we are closely accompanied by God while we are doing it? Does our contemplative spirit give rise to respect, service, openness and friendship when interacting with the people around us?

We entrust ourselves to the intercession of our Mother and the Holy Patriarch, asking them to help us to make our work an ever-clearer expression of service.

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 40.

^[2] *Ibid.*

^[3] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, no. 6.

^[4] Francis, Homily, 1 May 2020.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 51.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 48.

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joseph-the-worker/](https://opusdei.org/en-ke/article/meditations-may-1-saint-joseph-the-worker/) (05/03/2025)