

"Santification in Ordinary Work", third video of the Series "The Richness of Ordinary Life"

In the third episode of the series “The Richness of Ordinary Life” Prof. Regina Eya explains how the message of St. Josemaría about seeking holiness in ordinary life can be lived in the exercise of one's professional job or occupation.

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This is the third of the Series of videos presented by Prof. Regina Eya who explains how the message of St. Josemaría of seeking holiness in ordinary life, can be lived in the exercise of our job or occupation.

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CHAPTER 3

I AM OFF TO WORK, TO EARN MY DAY'S WAGE!

(Supernatural Life at Work)

Work is often seen as a necessity, as a means of earning a living to take care of one's needs and those of the family. It may be used to accumulate more money in order to afford the very many things money can buy for our material comfort. Sometimes work is also used to show off one's skills and educational qualifications

especially in the prestigious professions. But St. Josemaría teaches us that:

“Man’s duty to work...is an indispensable means which God has entrusted to us here, on this earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in God’s creative power. It enables us to earn our living and at the same time, to reap ‘the fruits of eternal life’ (John 4:36).”⁴

Work as path to heaven

In other words work is much more than earning a living. Fancy seeing your work not only as a money-making machine but also as the path to heaven for you. This means that you see the supernatural side of your work. And this means any kind of work, any honest work. It does not matter the profession, for, as Josemaría would say,” before God no occupation is in itself great or small.

Everything gains the value of the love with which it is done.”⁵ By this he means how much of Christ we become as we do our work, knowing that being like Christ in our work means serving like Christ in such a way that we work for God and we bring others to God. So for me the love with which I do my work is the secret. The love with which I begin it, continue it and finish it is what determines whether I have behaved like Christ in my profession.

So I begin by being punctual to work. I leave my home in good time, considering how long it will take to get to my place of work. I make my arrival an appointment with God who is awaiting me there and at the time stipulated for me to start. I offer up my punctuality and it is prayer. At the same time it makes others realise that it can be done. In these days of delays in salaries the temptation would be to repay my employer with

a negative attitude toward work. But no, I am not working for my employer only. No, my employer has just offered me the opportunity to have a means through which to serve God and win friends for Him. I am helping Jesus Christ to “set that fire”, (Luke 12:49) which he says he would it was already burning! So I set to work immediately as soon as I tell Jesus that now I begin my work with His help. Of course the work may not be easy. It may be quite tasking. I may have to teach so many hours and the classrooms are small and inadequate. My students coming from varying backgrounds may not be easy to handle. And sometimes the weather is too hot. But I consider that I have to devise ways of doing this job well, and cheerfully too. I offer up the difficult aspects of my job as prayer. I get the students to help me make the best of the classroom. I see in their faces a hunger for the truth and my role is to

help them discover that truth which ultimately is God, whatever their discipline. Their appreciation shows in their faces and with time perhaps the difficult ones stop being unruly. Even the factory worker could do the same with his work and with his colleagues. He takes extra care in the use and storage of his implements. So does the cook in a catering outfit.

Presence of God from beginning to end

So I do my work the best way possible. I take care of details. I break it up into manageable bits or units, at the beginning and end of which I call upon God to witness what I am doing or what I have finished for Him. I correct what I may not have done well because it is not good enough for God; and I remember to give God the glory for what I may have done well especially if I get applauded. All this I do in a natural way without doing anything

awkward. I say short ejaculatory prayers as I work. To remind me of the presence of God, I put a few objects here and there in my office—Our Lady's picture to remind me of her motherly care, a crucifix, a picture of a saint or a ring on my finger which reminds me each time I touch it to offer my work. At different times if I need to fight monotony, I offer small aspects or units of the work for different things —a difficult colleague, a problem in my home, forgiveness of my own sins, souls in Purgatory etc. I pause from time to time to examine my intentions and if I find I have strayed I rectify my intentions immediately and go on. And when I feel like giving up, a glance at any of my “memory objects” will perhaps urge me on to conclude, to finish what I have started so that it will be pleasing to God, since “Heroism at work is to be found in ‘finishing’ each task.”⁶

Being like Christ in my work place

As a lecturer I find it necessary to improve on my lecture notes each year. With so many responsibilities like committee meetings etc, the temptation is there to repeat the same lectures each year. But Josemaría teaches me to always remember that I am a child of God, that I am another Christ. So what would my Father, God want of me, of Christ? An examination of conscience makes me realize that this attitude of repeating old lectures will neither gain me professional prestige nor keep my students in touch with the latest developments in the discipline. So I make an effort to update the lectures. And then I realize that several lecturers sell lecture notes or “hand outs” to students at exorbitant prices against the University regulations. I make sure I don’t do the same, so people see that it is possible to obey the

regulation even in a bad economy, and I dissuade others from doing so. Then I encourage students to make use of the library rather than rely solely on the lecturer's handout as has been in vogue with many students in many universities in the country. With time I find that quite a few of these students are appreciative of this and their study habits as well as their academic performance improves. The patience has paid off! God has given the growth. Such students begin to trust you further and they go to you for personal as well as academic advice and you use this opportunity to talk to them about a plan of life and offering one's studies to God and rendering service to make the University a better place.

I may suffer distractions. Some of my colleagues may not want to work. There may be apathy on account of certain grievances. There may be so

much dishonesty. But I must set to work because I have learned from Josemaría that “God wants a handful of His own men in every field of endeavour.” I feel the need to be one of these “handfuls”. If my work place is good, it could be better. If it is bad, some one has to play Christ and Christianize it.

Fighting pagan atmosphere

And perhaps there is a pagan atmosphere where I work. At break time, perhaps, or when there is a need for a pause, the conversation may turn to what is offensive to God, the so-called modern jokes that actually can cause scandal. Or the attitude to sincerity and accountability may not be very healthy. Then this becomes a challenge to me, to Christ. I pray for God’s grace to resist the temptation. I pray for those who may have got involved. I rectify my intentions and

my behaviour if in the past I have inadvertently joined in this. I try to correct with charity those within my reach, be they superiors or subordinates. I do my best by my actions and in a natural way to live Christian principles in spite of the environment. I avoid a critical spirit, condemning what is wrong but not the person and realizing that I could be the same or even worse but for the grace of God. I practise ‘speaking in tongues’ by finding the appropriate words for different persons. I offer up these efforts... and this is prayer. It helps me be on my guard and I may have helped save some and for the rest, “at least they would have been warned” of the possibility of offending God by their behaviour. I offer some mortification to atone to Our Lord for my offences and those of my colleagues.

The need to strive for professional prestige

And what about my professional prestige? If Christ is to be put on top of my profession, then I must try to get to the top of my profession in order to put Him there. So I employ all the necessary means to improve my prestige—studying, acquiring all the necessary formation, perhaps in-service training, seminars, workshops, further qualifications,... all in an honest manner. That way it becomes necessary for me to improve in the way I do my work daily, weekly, yearly and I consider it my duty to do so. This might lead to recognition and positive appraisal of my work and may lead to my rising to higher positions. If this is obstructed for any reason, then one is satisfied that at any time one is the best he/she can be in one's profession. From this position of prestige it becomes possible to attract all those who look up to me to influence them to also work for God, (cf Furrow, St. Josemaría Escrivá, no.

781). But all this has been done in a natural way, just that all along I hold a silent dialogue with God.

So, yes,... I went to work to earn a wage. I still earn that wage I set out to earn; and I earn more than the wage my employer can afford—I earn God's friendship and teach others to do so.

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