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Cross and Resurrection in Work

"Both in Nazareth and on Calvary, Christ's work (and our own, in so far as we are united with him) is redemptive and sanctifying." A new article in the series "Sanctifying our Work."

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God granted St. Josemaría the light to grasp the profound meaning of work

in the life of Christians, called to identify themselves with Christ in the middle of the world. He saw Jesus' years in Nazareth as filled with meaning. In Christ's hands, "a professional occupation, similar to that carried out by millions of people all over the world, was turned into a divine task. It became a part of our Redemption, a way to salvation." [1]

The awareness that a Christian, through baptism, is a child of God and participates in Christ's priesthood, led St. Josemaría to see Jesus as a model for our professional work: a living model who has to take shape within us, and not simply an example to be imitated. More than working *like Christ*, a Christian is called to work *in Christ*, intimately united to him.

Therefore we want to contemplate carefully Jesus' work in Nazareth. A superficial glance is not enough. We

need to consider how his daily effort is joined to the surrender of his life on the Cross, and to his resurrection and ascension. Only in this way will we be able to discover that his work—and our own, in so far as we are united with him—is redemptive and sanctifying.

In Nazareth and on Calvary

We have been created to love God, and this love is expressed in the fulfilment of the divine will, with the obedience of sons and daughters. But our first parents disobeyed, and through disobedience suffering and death entered the world. The Son of God assumed our nature to make reparation for sin, fully obeying God's will in his own human will. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.* [2]

The sacrifice of Calvary is the culmination of Christ's obedience to his Father: *he became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.* [3] By freely accepting suffering and death, which are totally opposed to our natural instincts, he manifested in a supreme way that he had not come to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him. [4] But our Lord's surrender in his passion and death on the cross is not an isolated act of his loving obedience; rather it is the supreme expression of a full and absolute obedience that was present throughout his entire life, expressed in different ways: *Lo, I have come to do your will, O God.* [5]

At twelve years of age, when Mary and Joseph found him among the doctors in the Temple after seeking him for three days, Jesus told them: *Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?* [6] The Gospel doesn't tell us any more about his

hidden life, except that he obeyed Joseph and Mary, *he was obedient to them*, [7] and that he worked: he was a *carpenter*. [8]

Nevertheless, Jesus' words in the Temple light up the years spent in Nazareth. They make clear that when obeying his parents and when working he was *about his Father's business*, he was fulfilling the divine will. And just as by remaining in the Temple he accepted the three days of suffering (*three*, as in the Easter triduum) that knowing his parents were searching for him grief-stricken caused him, so also he accepted the difficulties that came with fulfilling the duties in his work and in daily life.

His obedience in Nazareth was not a lesser obedience, but the same interior disposition that led him to give his life on Calvary. It was an obedience rendered with his whole

heart, fully identified with the divine will at every moment. On Calvary, it was shown by shedding his blood; in Nazareth, by giving himself day by day, drop by drop, in his work as an artisan making agricultural implements and household furniture.

“He was the carpenter, the son of Mary . And he was God; he was achieving the redemption of mankind and drawing all things to himself.” [9] The redemptive value of Jesus' life in Nazareth cannot be understood if one separates it from the Cross—if one fails to understand that in his daily work he fulfilled his Father's will perfectly, out of love, ready to consummate his obedience in the Passion. [10]

Therefore, when the supreme moment of the sacrifice on Calvary arrived, our Lord offered his whole life, including his work in Nazareth.

The Cross is the “last stone” in his obedience, like the keystone in a cathedral arch that by its “weight” holds the other stones in place. So also the fulfilment of the divine will in Jesus' ordinary life has all the power of the obedience of the Cross. And at the same time it culminates in it, and through it his life in Nazareth is raised up to the Father in a redemptive sacrifice for all mankind.

Fulfilling our duties

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. [11] To follow Christ in our daily work is to fulfil there the divine will with the same obedience as Christ: *usque as mortem*, [12] even unto death. This doesn't just mean that a Christian ought to be ready to die rather than sin. The goal is much higher: at every moment we have to strive to die to our own will, renouncing everything

personal, so as to make God's will our own.

In his human will Jesus has the good and upright inclinations of our nature, and he offers this to the Father in the garden of Olives when he prays: *not my will, but thine, be done* . [13] In us, our own will includes our selfishness, a disordered love of self. Our Lord did not carry this disorder within himself, but took it upon himself on the Cross to redeem us. Now, with his grace, we can offer God the struggle against selfishness for love. To become identified with the divine will, each of us has to reach the point of being able to say with St. Paul: *I have been crucified with Christ.*[14]

“We must give ourselves in everything, we must deny ourselves in everything: the sacrifice must be a holocaust.”[15] It is not a question of renouncing noble ideals and

ambitions, but of always directing them to the fulfilment of God's will. He wants the talents he has given us to yield a return. Obedience and the sacrifice of our own will in work means using our talents for God's glory and the service of others, not for our vainglory and self-interest.

And how does God want us to use our talents? What must we do to fulfil his will in our work? This question can be answered briefly if one understands well all that is implied in the answer: God wants us to fulfil our duty. "Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: do what you ought and concentrate on what you are doing." [16]

God's will is manifested in the duties of daily life. By its nature the fulfilment of duty demands subjecting our will to what has to be done, and this is what constitutes the

obedience of a child of God. It means rejecting our personal preferences and inclinations and taking what God wants as the supreme norm—which is that we fulfil our duties.

What are they? Work itself is a duty indicated by God from the beginning, and consequently laziness is the first front on which we have to struggle. Afterwards there is the general duty which crystallises for each person in the specific duties of one's chosen profession—in accord with one's *professional vocation*, which forms part of the divine vocation. [17] Among these are the duties of professional ethics, fundamental to Christian life, and others that stem from one's personal circumstances.

Fulfilling these duties is part of God's will, since he has created human beings to perfect the world through their work, [18] and this, in the case

of the ordinary faithful, involves carrying out temporal activities as perfectly as possible, in accord with their own proper laws, and for the good of individuals, the family and society. This good is discovered through the use of reason and, in a surer and fuller way, through reason illumined by a living faith, *faith working through love*.^[19] At times this may call for heroism, as it certainly does to fulfil God's will unswervingly in the little things of each day. But God rewards this heroism with the divine mark of peace and joy: *on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased*; ^[20] *the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart*.^[21]

The Christian ideal of fulfilment of duty is not the same as the conscientious person who strictly carries out obligations of justice. A child of God has a much broader and deeper concept of duty, seeing love

itself as the first duty, the first commandment of God's will. Consequently we should try to fulfil our professional duties out of love and with love; we strive to be as generous as possible in these duties, without thinking we are going too far, knowing that Christ gave his life for us. And since this love, the charity of the children of God, is the essence of holiness, we can understand why St. Josemaría said that holiness is summed up in fulfilling “the duty of each moment.”

Value of effort and fatigue

“In itself work is not a penalty or a curse or a punishment: those who speak of it that way have not understood sacred Scripture properly.” [22] God created man to till the earth and care for it, [23] and only after our first parents sinned did he say: *in the sweat of your face shall you eat bread.*[24] The

punishment for sin is the fatigue that accompanies work, not work itself, and divine wisdom has converted it into an instrument of redemption. To take on work is, for us, an integral part of obedience to God's will, a redemptive obedience in the daily fulfilment of duty. "With a fully lay mentality you exercise this priestly spirit in offering to God your work, your rest, the joys and the difficulties of each day, the holocaust of your bodies worn out by the effort of constant service. All this is *a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*"[25]

A Christian doesn't shirk the sacrifice involved in work. We try not to become irritated because of the effort required, or abandon our duty through boredom or tiredness. In difficulties we see Christ's Cross, which gives a redemptive meaning to our toil, the Cross which "is calling for a pair of shoulders to bear it."

[26] The Founder of Opus Dei gives us some well-tested advice: "Before you start working, place a crucifix on your desk or beside your tools. From time to time glance at it... When tiredness creeps in, your eyes will go towards Jesus, and you will find new strength to continue with your task."

[27]

A son or daughter of God should not be discouraged by failure, nor base all their hope and satisfaction on human success. The redemptive value of work does not depend on earthly success but on the loving fulfilment of God's will. We mustn't forget that in Nazareth Jesus fulfilled the divine will by working actively, whereas on the Cross he completed his obedience by suffering. The high point of *not my will but thine be done*

[28] did not consist in accomplishing this or that human project, but in suffering unto death, completely abandoned to his Father's will.[29]

Thus we have to understand that we co-redeem with Christ not so much through the things we *do* –our jobs and initiatives—as through the things we *suffer* , when God permits the *easy yoke* and the *light burden* [30] of the Cross to become more apparent.

St. Josemaría teaches this lesson of holiness in words that reflect his own experience. “But do not forget that being with Jesus means we shall most certainly come upon his Cross. When we abandon ourselves into God's hands, he frequently permits us to taste sorrow, loneliness, opposition, slander, defamation, ridicule, coming from within and from outside. This is because he wants to mould us into his own image and likeness. He even tolerates that we be called lunatics and be taken for fools. This is the time to love passive mortification...When we undergo periods of passive purgation, that we find painful and

hard to bear, periods when we shed sweet and bitter tears, which we do our best to hide, we will feel the need to enter into each one of his most Holy Wounds: to be purified and strengthened, rejoicing in his redeeming Blood. We will go there like the doves which, in the words of Scripture, find shelter from the storm in the crevices in the rocks. We hide in this refuge to find the intimacy of Christ. We find his conversation soothing and his countenance comely."[31]

Light of the resurrection

After writing in the letter to the Philippians that Christ made himself *obedient unto death, even death on a cross*,[32] St. Paul continues: *therefore God has highly exalted him.* [33] *Our Lord's exaltation, his resurrection and ascension into heaven where he is seated at the right hand of God*,[34] are inseparable

from his obedience on the Cross, and together with it shed a bright light on Jesus' work in Nazareth, and on our own daily toil.

Jesus' life in Nazareth is both human and divine: it is the life of the Son of God made man. Although his life doesn't become glorious and immortal until after the resurrection, already, in the Transfiguration, he manifests for a moment the hidden glory that was his during the years spent in Joseph's workshop. The person we see working as a carpenter, fulfilling his duty with perspiration and fatigue, is the Son of God made man, *full of grace and truth*,^[35] who in his sacred Humanity lives a new, supernatural life: life according to the Holy Spirit. He whom we see subject himself to the demands of work, who obeys those with authority, in his family and society, so as thus to obey the divine will, is the same one we see

ascend into heaven with power and majesty as King and Lord of the universe. His resurrection and ascension allow us to contemplate how the work, obedience and fatigue of Nazareth, while a demanding sacrifice, are never dark and sad. Rather they are luminous and triumphant, like a new creation.

As Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too walk in newness of life.[36] We too can live, in the midst of our daily occupations, "in heaven and on earth," "divinized,"[37] because God, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.[38] God exalted the sacred Humanity of Christ because of his obedience, so that we could live this new life, guided by the Love of God, dying to disordered self-

love. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.[39]

If in our work we fulfil the divine will out of love, no matter how much it costs, God will exalt us with Christ. Even now he gives us a pledge of glory through the gift of the Holy Spirit. [40] Thanks to the Paraclete our work becomes holy, we ourselves are sanctified, and the world begins to be renewed. "In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the resurrection of Christ, we always find a glimmer of new life, of the new good, as if it were an announcement of 'the new heavens and the new earth' in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work . . . The Cross which this toil

constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself." [41]

Together with the obedience of the Cross and the joy of the resurrection—the new supernatural life—in the loving fulfilment of God's will in our work, the victory of the ascension must be present as well. We have received the world as an inheritance to make God's will a reality in all earthly things. *For all things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's* . [42]

This is the tenor of the redemptive love of God's children in all their work. “Go about your professional duties for Love's sake. Do everything for the sake of love and (precisely because you are in love, even though you may taste the bitterness of misunderstanding, of injustice, of ingratitude and even of failure in men's eyes) you will see the result in the wonders that your work

produces—rich, abundant fruit, the promise of eternity!" [43]

In union with the Sacrifice of the Mass

Our Lord's sacrifice on the Cross, his resurrection, and his ascension, constitute the unity of the paschal mystery, the “passage” from time to eternity. His work in Nazareth is redemptive and sanctifying because of its union with this mystery.

This reality is reflected in the lives of the children of God thanks to the Holy Mass, which “makes present not only the mystery of the Savior's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection.” [44]

“This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only *after he has left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there.” [45]

Thanks to the Mass, we can imbue our work with a spirit of obedience unto death, with the new life of the resurrection, and with the dominion we have over all things as a result of Christ's ascension as Lord of heaven and earth. Not only do we offer our work at Mass, but we can turn our work, as it were, into a "Mass." "All the works of men are done as if on an altar, and each one of you, in that union of contemplative souls which is your day, in some way says 'his Mass,' which lasts twenty-four hours, in expectation of the Mass to follow, which will last another twenty-four hours, and so on until the end of our lives." [46] Thus in our work we are "other Christs, Christ himself." [47]

Javier Lopez

Footnotes:

[1] St. Josemaría, *Conversations* , 55.

[2] *Rom* 5:19.

[3] *Phil* 2:8.

[4] Cf. *Jn* 6:38; *Lk* 22:42.

[5] *Heb* 10:7; *Ps* 40[39]:8-9.

[6] *Lk* 2:49.

[7] *Lk* 2:51.

[8] *Mk* 6:3. Cf. *Mt* 13:55.

[9] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By* , 14 (*Mk* 6:3, *Jn* 12:32).

[10] Cf. *Mk* 10:33-34; *Lk* 12:49-50.

[11] *Lk* 9:23.

[12] *Phil* 2:8.

[13] *Lk* 22:42.

[14] *Gal* 2:20.

[15] St. Josemaría, *The Way* , 186.

[16] *Ibid* ., 815.

[17] Cf. "Working for Love" in this series on "Sanctifying our Work."

[18] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* , 302.

[19] *Gal* 5:6.

[20] *Lk* 2:14.

[21] *Ps* 19[18]:9.

[22] *Christ is Passing By* , 47.

[23] Cf. *Gen* 2:15.

[24] Cf. *Gen* 3:19.

[25] St. Josemaría, *Letter* 6 May 1945, 27 (*Rom* 12:1); cited in Ernst Burkhardt and Javier López, *Vida Cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría* , vol. III, Rialp, Madrid 2013, p. 109.

[26] St. Josemaría, *The Way* , 277.

[27] St. Josemaría, *Way of the Cross* ,
XI station, point 5.

[28] *Lk* 22:42.

[29] Cf. *Lk* 23:46; *Mt* 27:46.

[30] *Mt* 11:30.

[31] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God* ,
301-302 (*Song* 2:14).

[32] *Phil* 2:8.

[33] *Phil* 2:9.

[34] *1 Pet* 3:22. cf. *Mt* 26:64; *Heb* 1:13;
10:12.

[35] *Jn* 1:14.

[36] *Rom* 6:4.

[37] Cf. *Christ is Passing By* , no. 8.

[38] *Eph* 2:5-6.

[39] *Col* 3:1-3.

[40] Cf. 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14.

[41] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* (14 September 1981), 27 (2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1)

[42] 1 Cor 3:22-23.

[43] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God* , 68.

[44] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 14.

[45] *Ibid* ., 11.

[46] St. Josemaría, notes from a meditation, 19 March 1968; cited in Bishop Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2009.

[47] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By* , 106.

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