

Meditations: Seventh Sunday of Saint Joseph (with audio)

Seventh reflection for the seven Sundays of Saint Joseph. The topics are: Jesus worked alongside Joseph; rediscovering the value of work; work and prayer, prayer and work.

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THE EVANGELIST Saint Luke sums up Jesus' childhood by saying that "the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (*Lk* 2:40). A few verses later, he summarizes the adolescent years of our Lord in these words: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (*Lk* 2:52). It can surprise us that our all-powerful God wanted to experience the normal process of human growth. The God-man lived a life very similar to that of the other inhabitants of Nazareth. He learned the law and his trade from Saint Joseph's example and words, perhaps by imitating him. He also learned how to read and write, how to treat people, how to rest. Jesus' days – like those of his neighbors or ours – will have revolved largely around family relationships, friendship and work.

The Messiah may have spent most of his hours in his father's workshop.

“That was the way Jesus lived for thirty years, as *fabri filius*, ‘the son of the carpenter.’ There followed three years of public life, spent among the crowds. People were surprised: ‘Who is this?’ they asked. ‘Where has he learned these things?’ For he was just like them: he had shared the life of ordinary people.”[1] This helps us appreciate how work is part of the divine plan for mankind. In the book of Genesis, human beings are seen as the custodians of creation, able to transform and make the world beautiful, continuing the work of the Creator. Hence by our work we can help create an environment, a city, a country where intimate dialogue with God becomes easier.

“SANCTITY, for the vast majority of people, involves sanctifying their work, sanctifying themselves in it,

and sanctifying others through it.”[2]
With these words, the founder of Opus Dei summed up a key part of the message God had entrusted to him in order to remind Christians of this truth. What does it mean to “sanctify our work”? First, it means doing it well, with love, putting care into the details, like any upright person. Then, we need to do it with the realization that we are sharing in God’s way of loving his creation, with love for all men and women and the world around us. This leads us, in some way, to become contemplatives in the middle of the world. “All the works of men are done as if on an altar,” Saint Josemaria said. “And each of you, in that union of contemplative souls that is your day, says in some way ‘his Mass,’ which lasts twenty-four hours.”[3]

The natural result of this divine encounter will be to always do our work with the aim of serving others

as God's children and improving the world around us. "Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use a metaphor, 'anoints' us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts (cf. *Jn* 5:17)." [4] However, sin has also left its mark here, for example, when our work becomes an end only to achieve social or economic recognition. "It is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life." [5] Saint John Paul II also warned against viewing work "exclusively as a commodity, with a cold logic of financial profit to be able to acquire well-being, consume and thus continue producing." [6]

Looking at Saint Joseph, who taught Jesus how to work, can help us to rediscover the true value of our daily

tasks. Joseph can help us to not turn them into merely an earthly goal, but to discover there the *quid divinum*, the “divine element” that unites us to God and leads us to intercede for the needs of each person, also their material needs.

“I HAVE OFTEN SAID that we must not allow these periods of conversation with Jesus, who sees us and hears us from the Tabernacle, to degenerate into an impersonal type of prayer. If we want our meditation to develop right away into a personal dialogue with our Lord (for which the sound of words is not necessary), we must shed the cloak of anonymity and put ourselves in his presence, just as we are ... To this I now add that your work too must become a personal prayer, that it must become a real conversation with Our Father

in heaven. If you seek sanctity in and through your work, you will necessarily have to strive to turn it into personal prayer.”[7]

Making each hour of our work an hour of prayer is not necessarily a matter of adding vocal prayers or pious reminders during our daily efforts. Praying with our work means (besides nourishing it with our interior life that we strengthen at other times) being aware that through our manual or intellectual work we can help God care for people and the world around us.

Someone once asked Saint Josemaría in a get-together: “I am a surgeon and I have ten children. For fifteen years the spirit of the Work has been my guide and my strength. But there are days when my professional duties rob me of time for anything. What can I do to continue sanctifying myself, and look after my family as

God wants?” The founder of Opus Dei replied: “But what are you doing when you care for the sick if not a quasi-priestly work? You are almost a priest, and you have the soul of a priest! At the same time that you heal the wounds and diseases of the body, you heal those of the soul, just with your look, with your way of treating the sick, with a timely word, with an affectionate smile ... From morning to night and from night to morning, you are with God.”[8] So with the feast of the Holy Patriarch fast approaching, we can ask Joseph to teach us how to assist our Lord in the best way possible through our work:

“Blessed Joseph, to us too,

show yourself a father

and guide us in the path of life.

Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,

and defend us from every evil.
Amen.”[9]

[1] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 14.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 55.

[3] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 19 March 1968.

[4] Francis, General Audience, 1 May 2013.

[5] Benedict XVI, Homily, 19 March 2006.

[6] Saint John Paul II, General Audience, 1 May 1984.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 64.

[8] Saint Josemaría, Notes taken in a family get-together in Valencia, 17 November 1972.

[9] Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris corde*, Epilogue.

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