

# What does it mean to sanctify work?

To sanctify work is to strive to do it well, with professional competence, putting all of one's talents, intelligence, will and affection into the work at hand. However, it is also a matter of one's intention at the moment of working. It is worth asking oneself: Why am I doing this? What is the point of doing it well when no one sees me?

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**Summary**

1. Are we made to work, or is work a punishment?
2. What does it mean to sanctify work?
3. Three facets of the same reality
4. Is all work of equal value?

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## **1. Are we made to work, or is work a punishment?**

Man is made to work, not only because it is written in the book of Genesis that he was created to till the earth and care for it, but because it is the way in which God gives the human being the capacity to transform himself, creating new things, not only to satisfy his human needs but also to improve the world. We could say that man is a worker and a producer, because by working

he obtains what he needs; by means of this work he organizes and transforms the environment in which he lives. "What is good about work (...) is that one sees the result and feels 'divine,' feels like God, capable of creating. In a certain sense, you feel like a man or a woman holding the first child in one's arms. The ability to create is life-changing" (*Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio*).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 2428) teaches that "in work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. the primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community."

We cannot act without getting better or worse. Therefore, work helps man to perfect himself, acquire new habits, strengthen his abilities, gain experience, broaden his knowledge, make new discoveries and be able to create tools. As Pope Francis puts it in a homily entitled "Work is Man's Vocation," work "has in itself a goodness and creates the harmony of things — beauty, goodness — and involves man in everything: in his thought, in his action, in everything. Man is involved in work. It is man's first vocation: to work. And this gives dignity to man. The dignity that makes him resemble God, the dignity of work."

It is common to think of work as a punishment or as a reality to which there is no other choice. Although we cannot deny that work produces fatigue or that it is indispensable to sustain oneself, work is much more than that; it implies a whole personal

development that allows man to reach his fullness.

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- It 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', for 'man is born to work as the birds are born to fly'. (*Friends of God*, no. 57)
- Having put them very much to the test, I am very fond of repeating these artless but very expressive verses: My life consists in loving,/ And if with loving I'm familiar,/ It's because I've sorrowed much;/ For there's no finer lover,/ Than one who's suffered much.

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! (*Friends of God*, no. 68)

- Our calling discloses to us the meaning of our existence. It means being convinced, through faith, of the reason for our life on earth. Our life, the present, past and future, acquires a new dimension, a depth we did not perceive before. All happenings and events now fall within their true perspective: we understand where God is leading us, and we feel

ourselves borne along by this task entrusted to us." (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 45)

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## **2. What does it mean to sanctify work?**

Sanctification is, in short, the union of man with God. This means that when we work, it is not enough to have the intention of doing it well, seeking personal development, achieving success or obtaining human rewards; in order to sanctify our work, it is necessary to encounter Jesus: to carry out our task not only for Him, but with Him, thus totally changing the meaning of our work. It is not a matter of saying prayers while performing an activity, but of loving God with deeds, serving others through that occupation and redeeming the world with Jesus.

For a Christian, it is a way of resembling God, of uniting oneself to Him and, above all, of forging habits that will later help every activity carried out to be elevated towards God. As Pope Francis said in a general audience on May 1, 2013, work "is a fundamental element for the dignity of a person. Work, to use an image, 'anoints' us with dignity, fills us with dignity; it makes us like God, who worked and still works, who always acts (cf. Jn 5:17)."

Point 2427 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that "Human work proceeds directly from the persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. Hence work is a duty: "If any one will not work, let him not eat." Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the

hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ.

### **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- Add a supernatural motive to your ordinary work and you will have sanctified it. (*The Way*, no. 359)
- And so, as the motto of your work, I can give you this one: If you want to be useful, serve. For, in the first place, in order to do things properly, you must know how to do them. I cannot see the integrity of a person

who does not strive to attain professional skills and to carry out properly the task entrusted to his care. It's not enough to want to do good; we must know how to do it. And, if our desire is real, it will show itself in the effort we make to use the right methods, finishing things well, achieving human perfection.

*(Christ Is Passing By, no. 50)*

- You really do need to make an effort and put your shoulder to the wheel... For all that, you should put your professional interests in their place: they are only means to an end; they can never be regarded — in any way — as if they were the basic thing. How many of these forms of “*professionalitis*” make union with God impossible! *(Furrow, no. 502)*

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### **3. Three facets of the same reality**

St. Josemaría Escrivá received a special call from God to remind all men that work in the midst of the world is material for one's sanctification. Specifically, he spoke of three dimensions or effects of sanctified work: the work itself, the person who does it, and the others who benefit from this work. These are three facets of the same reality. What does each one mean?

Sanctifying work means doing everything we can so that the work is well done. This requires a continuous effort to give the best of oneself, to look for ways to innovate and improve the quality of one's work, etc. "You cannot sanctify work which humanly speaking is slapdash, for we must not offer God badly-done jobs." (*Furrow*, n. 493). For St. Josemaría, "man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work

is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort" (*Christ Is Passing By*, n. 48).

Sanctifying ourselves in our work means that, as we work, we forge virtues; the very virtues of Jesus. We become more like God, we identify with Him, and we spend our lives for others, as Jesus did in coming to earth to save us.

Sanctifying others through our work has to do with the social and apostolic dimension of our work. Work always has an impact on others, since it implies providing a service to others, and this necessarily has an impact on the betterment of society. We have all experienced how the example of a working person is a source of inspiration. Anyone who has been the recipient of an excellent

service knows that the experience can be transformative. Receiving good service, being served with kindness, makes us feel loved and respected and makes us want to do the same for others. It becomes a virtuous circle where you want to give back what you have received.

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#### **4. Are all jobs of equal value?**

In the world, we tend to categorize jobs according to the academic preparation they require, their level of difficulty, the skills required to perform them, their economic remuneration, etc. We attribute a certain value to the occupation according to these categories. But God's logic is different. His criterion for defining the value of a job is the love and uprightness of the heart of the one who performs it.

For God, all jobs, whether they require more or less technical or intellectual preparation, are of equal value and all are important for the advancement of society. He himself gave us an example in Jesus Christ, who lived a life of intense hidden work as a carpenter. Although it was a lowly trade in the eyes of many of his contemporaries, it was the instrument God chose for 30 years of his life on earth to redeem the world and save us, not only by dying on the Cross, but also through his work.

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- Work, all work, bears witness to the dignity of man, to his dominion over creation. It is an opportunity to develop one's personality. It is a bond of union with others, the way to support one's family, a means of aiding in the improvement of the society in which we live and

in the progress of all humanity.

*(Christ Is Passing By, no. 47)*

- Work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man's life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies.

*(Christ Is Passing By, no. 47)*

- For the love of God, for the love of souls, and to live up to our Christian vocation, we must give good example. So as not to give scandal, or to provoke even the faintest suspicion that the children of God are soft and useless, so as not to disedify..., you must strive to show an example of balanced justice, to behave properly as responsible men. *(Friends of God, no. 70)*
- Professional work, whatever it is, becomes a lamp to enlighten your colleagues and friends. That is why I usually tell those

who become members of Opus Dei, and the same applies to all of you now listening to me: 'What use is it telling me that so and so is a good son of mine — a good Christian — but a bad shoemaker?' If he doesn't try to learn his trade well, or doesn't give his full attention to it, he won't be able to sanctify it or offer it to Our Lord. The sanctification of ordinary work is, as it were, the hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to come close to God while being at the same time fully involved in temporal affairs. (*Friends of God*, no. 61)

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