

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE SACREDNESS OF WORK

Thank God for work, sometimes that's the only thing that sits between us and unbearable melancholy. Work is a wonderful, God-given, thing.

We lack a good theology of work. Too often work is seen as something that takes us away from God and prayer, a distraction to the spiritual life. Hard work is admitted to be a good, honest thing, but, even so, never a holy thing in itself, a gift from God so that we can be co-creators with Him.

In fact, in some theologies, work is seen as a punishment for sin, something introduced on the planet after Adam's sin, not willed or intended by God ideally. In this view, except for sin, there would be no work.

Some of this, of course, is true. Work can be a distraction and an escape (both from God and family). It can be a rationalization against entering into the deeper things. As well, we too easily take our self-worth from our work so that we feel good about ourselves only when we are achieving something and are anxious always that, deep down, outside of our work and our achievements, we have little to offer. And so we work to try to prove ourselves and our work often becomes cancerous, something we can't quit doing because our entire sense of self-worth is tied up with it. There are real dangers in work.

But there are dangers in everything. Work can be an excuse to avoid the deeper things, but it is also the deep, natural form of contemplation that God gives to us as humans.

We have to spend most of our waking lives working. That should tell us something, namely, that work must be the major avenue through which God wants us to journey towards the deeper things. Given the way we are built and the way life is shaped, God surely does not expect us to consciously think about Him most of our waking moments. God is not an egotistical tyrant, demanding our conscious attention, even while we are have to work long hours amidst all the heartaches, headaches, restlessness, anxieties, fears, and preoccupations that impale themselves upon us every waking minute. If God wants our conscious attention every waking minute, then there is some fatal flaw in the way we are built and the way life is set up.

But there is no fatal flaw. God is the ground of our being, the ground too of our work and our relationships. In God "we live and move and have our being." We know God not just in our conscious awareness and in prayer, but also in a deep inchoate way, by participating with Him in building this world - by growing things, building things, carving things, creating things, cleaning things, painting things, writing things, raising children, nursing bodies, teaching others, consoling others, humoring others, struggling with others, and loving others. Work, like prayer, is a privileged way to get to know God because, when we work, we are toiling in partnership with Him.

Jesus knew well both the feel of work and of tiredness. Here's a little meditation from Caryll Houselander:

"Christ earned his living, with the joys, exultations, fatigues of other men. Had you gone to visit his home in Nazareth you would have found him like other men, but giving a significance

to ordinary things that others often fail to do. Imagine such a visit. ... you have come to supper. He is putting away his tools; unconsciously he smiles at the burnish on them; you see how he loves his tools. On the floor by the bench there are wood shavings, how clean and fine they are, curled like yellow petals. What a beautiful thing work is, seen from this man's angle! He sits down in the doorway, you with him, you notice the signs of the day's fatigue, good fatigue that seeps out of one in the evening. He wipes his face, his eyes are a little tired, they have the intensity of eyes that use the last rays of light. Yes, he works hard. He gives good measure."

Ron Rolheiser

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FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

September 8



The liturgy enthusiastically celebrates Mary's Nativity and makes it one of the most appealing feasts of Marian devotion. Mary's birth is a prelude to the birth of Jesus because it is the initial point of the realization of the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of mankind. How could the birthday of the Mother of the Redeemer pass unnoticed in the hearts of the redeemed? The Mother proclaims the Son, making it known that He is about to come, that the divine promises, made centuries before are to be fulfilled. The birth of Mary is the dawn of our redemption; her appearance projects a new light over all the human race; a light of innocence, of purity, of grace, a resplendent presage of the great light which will inundate the world when Christ, "*lux mundi*," the Light of the World, appears. Mary, preserved from sin in anticipation of Christ's merits, not only announces that the Redemption is at hand, but she bears the first fruits of it within herself; she is the first one redeemed by her divine Son. Through her, all-pure and full of grace, the Blessed Trinity at last fixes on earth a look of complacency, finding in her alone a creature in whom the infinite beauty of the Godhead can be reflected.

The birth of Jesus excepted, no other was so important in God's eyes or so fruitful for the good of humanity, as was the birth of Mary. Yet it has remained in complete obscurity. There is no mention of it in Sacred Scriptures and when we look for the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel, we find only what refers to Joseph; we find nothing explicit about Mary's ancestry except the allusion to her descent from David. Our Lady's origin is wrapped in silence, as was her whole life. Thus, her birth speaks to us of humility.

Let Mary's humble, hidden life be the model of ours, and if, in emulating her, we have to struggle against our ever-recurrent tendencies to pride, let us confidently seek her maternal aid, and she will help us to triumph over all vainglory.

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