



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

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Your attitude to work tells a lot about you

Do you grumble and moan? Or do you face your job with enthusiasm? In a recent talk on the social teachings of the Catholic Church, Father David Garcia spoke on the notion of work, and why it is holy. This article summarises what he said.

WHAT is it about work that causes people to sigh whenever it is mentioned? Work can be broadly defined as exerting oneself physically or mentally in order to do, make, or accomplish something, often in exchange for a wage.

There are different reasons why we work. Some may work to make friends and socialise, some to pass the time, and some to do something meaningful for society.

But most of us work to earn a salary to pay the bills.

So work is important to the employee. It is also important to the employer because the employer gets the necessary performance, output or product from the employee to complete the "economic work cycle".

In cartoons depicting work situations, we often see people tearing their hair, perspiring under a tall stack of unfinished work, developing a migraine from being glued to the computer, and so forth. They depict the idea that work can be torture. And it explains why many of us struggle to get out of bed to go to work every morning?

Some say the fact that this activity is called "work" reflects how this is something nobody wants to do and that is why you have to be paid to do it.

Is Work a Punishment?

Is work a necessary evil? Is work, in fact, a punishment for our sins, for Man's fall from grace?

Our social doctrine teaches us that work is not the consequence of sin: "Work is part of the original state of man and precedes his fall. It is therefore not a punishment or curse." (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC), 256)

"Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, and we are placed in the visible universe in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore we are called to work." (Genesis 1:26; *Laborem Exercens*, 0)

So we are really called to be good stewards of God's creation and to tend to it with loving care. "God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it." (Genesis 2:15)

How Work Can Become Toil

While work is not the consequence of Man's sin, toil is.

Toil results from man's disharmony with God. Ever since the beginning of time, human beings wanted to be masters of their own destiny. We were faced with the great temptation to be as great as God, to be the Creator and not just one of the creations. Self interest took precedence over the common good for all, and over God's intention for His creation.

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, who broke their relationship of trust and harmony with God, work which is in disharmony with God's plan became toil and pain. "From that moment, only by the sweat of one's brow will it be possible to reap its fruit." (Genesis 3:17, 19)

Where we no longer see work as an effort which helps us to be the best that we can be, or as an effort that would help each of us



improve our relationships with one another and with God, we will find great difficulty in enjoying our work. Work will become a chore, something to be avoided. Work will become just about toiling.

Our attitudes can determine whether it is work or toil.

There is a story of two men sweating in the hot sun, laying bricks. A passer-by asked the first man what he was doing. "Can you not see?" the worker replied ruefully. "I am breaking my back building this brick wall. I cannot wait for the day to end and go home to rest. It's such an agony coming to work each morning. I must find another job. Meanwhile, please do not bother me anymore."

Asked the same question, the second worker replied enthusiastically: "Can you not see? I am building a house of God. I cannot wait to finish building this Church so that people can come and worship God. Can I show you around?"

The first worker was toiling. The second worker was participating in God's plan.

The Spirituality of Work

Work, when it is not toil, is a good thing for humans, for our humanity - even if the work can be hard. In the work that we do, working for any boss is actually working for The Boss. Humans participate here and now to build up God's Kingdom here on earth.

Jesus Christ is a man of work, a craftsman, who participated in earthly activities and the heavenly activities of God. There should be awareness that human work is a participation in God's activity, even in the most ordinary everyday activities. "We cooperate with God in our own redemption through our daily activities." (*Laborem Exercens*, 115)

We should therefore see work that is tough or hard as a "cross with a meaning". Sweat and pain from work present the Christian with the possibility of sharing lovingly in the work that Christ came to do. This work of salvation came about through suffering and death on a Cross.

By enduring the hardness of work in union with Christ, we in a way collaborate with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity. "They will show themselves to be a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross

every day in the activity that they are called upon to perform." (*Laborem Exercens*, 127)

The expectations of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating the one that we live in now. It is of our concern to ensure that this earthly progress can contribute to the better ordering of human society which is vital to the Kingdom of God.

At the same time, we are called to imitate God not only in working but also in resting (*Laborem Exercens*, 114). God showed the way when He rested on the seventh and last day of His creation work. Therefore human work too requires a rest every "seventh day" so that the human person is not only rested physically, but more importantly, it allows the human person to rest with God, to spend some time with God.

In His preaching, Jesus teaches man not to be enslaved by work. Before all else, he must be concerned about his soul; gaining the whole world is not the purpose of his life (*Mark 8:36; SDC 260*).

The Dignity of Work

It is our intrinsic dignity as human persons that gives work its dignity. Human beings make work holy because human beings are holy and created with infinite dignity by God.

Regardless of the nature of the work we do, whether it is managing a multi-million dollar business or cleaning the floors of the building owned by the multi-million dollar business, all work is of equal dignity because God has given each person infinite worth.

In Mother Teresa's words, "every work of love, done with a full heart always brings people closer to God"

So we look to Jesus as the model worker as He works tirelessly, accomplishing powerful deeds to free men and women from sickness, suffering and death during His earthly ministry. He describes His own mission as that of working: "My Father is working still, and I am working." (*John 5:17*)

CSCC reports are out

The Caritas Singapore Community Council's annual reporting for 2008 comes in two separately bound reports. In addition, a four-page Stewardship Report has also been issued through the parishes.

The CSCC Annual Report 2008 describes programmes for the year grouped by its three main roles: coordinating the Church's social mission, mobilising the community, and enabling CSCC member organisations. It also features the various stakeholders of CSCC.

The CSCC Governance and Financial Report 2008 reports on its compliance with the Charity Code of Governance and its financial statements in compliance with charity standards.

You may download these reports from CSCC website. If you wish to receive a hard copy, please send an e-mail to annualreport@caritas-singapore.org or call 6337 3711.

