

1) SAINT JOSEPH WAS KNOWN AS A CARPENTER

Father Gian Matteo Botto

A) Saint Joseph the “carpenter”

In the Gospel according to Matthew, our Lord is described by Matthew in this way: “Is he not **the carpenter’s son?**»¹ Saint Joseph was the artisan who everyone in the little village of Nazareth knew.

The term used for « carpenter » is **téktōn**, which refers to the one who knows how to work with wood to produce furniture and crafts ; it can also indicate someone who masters woodworking and stoneworking.²

In the Gospel according to Mark, our Lord Jesus is described by Mark in the following way: « Is he not the **carpenter?** »³. Before beginning his public ministry, Jesus worked, until he was 30 years old, in the workshop of his father « Joseph, the carpenter ». He learned to work by watching Saint Joseph work and by working with him. Decades of working : this allows us to understand how valuable work was to him.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITY / 1

=> LET’S TAKE A FEW MINUTES FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What would be your answer if you were asked : Why do you work ?

Find two reasons and write them down.

(60 seconds of silence to reflect and write)

¹ Mt 13,55

² The Tékton... [is] traditionally a carpenter, plus precisely : a builder » (Gnilka, The Gospel of Matthew, Brescia 1990, I., 745). In Italian, the « falegname » [term composed of « do » and « wood »] is the woodworker who makes and repairs furniture and other hand-crafted objects. He is different than the carpenter who does woodworking for construction (scaffolding, casings, etc...).

³ Mk 6,3

B) The value of work

Since the Gospel, in speaking of Saint Joseph, mentions his profession, we can see an invitation to understand the purpose of work.

1) FIRST PURPOSE

To offer oneself and one's family with **the means** for a dignified and peaceful life.

In order to save us, the Lord Jesus wanted to become man within a real human family ; Saint Joseph had to work to provide for his family, to feed Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Our Lord did not choose a well-off family, who lived on their income, which would have allowed him to spend his time philosophizing, to study with the best teachers. He became flesh and needed a father to provide for him through the work of the father's hands.

This fact expresses all the **dignity that God confers to human work**.

*** To examine the value of work, we can consider two extremes.**

One can consider work with a certain "**disdain**", especially manual work, and when one is at work, one can only think about leaving as early as possible at the end of the day in order to escape to the much more amusing activities of the week-end: this amounts to renouncing finding meaning in work and to choosing to run away.

Other thinkers, on the other hand, have exalted work as the sole purpose of man and of history ⁴, an attitude that we find in those who are constantly busy with meetings, appointments and trips, and have no time for anything else.

*** The Church teaches us to give meaning to work, placing at the center not the work but the man – who works.**⁵

In creating man, God entrusted him with Creation, with « dominion » over the created world.

Man is the « dominus », the one who exercises « dominion » over his house (« domus ») ; he is the « responsible » guardian of Creation – including through work – he is not the « owner » of Creation ⁶.

Original sin puts this vocation in the grip of selfishness and makes work tiring, sometimes heavy ; however, work remains a good for man⁷.

⁴ For example: Locke, Hegel, Marx.

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, (hereafter GS) 35.

⁶ This man-environment relationship is the founding of Christian ecology.

⁷ "The sometimes heavy toil [...] do not alter the fact that [it is about the] means whereby man achieves « domination » [...] over the visible world... And yet, in spite of all this toil - perhaps, in a sense, because of it-work is a good thing for man » Saint Jean Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, Encyclical Letter of September 14, 1982, 9 (hereafter LE)

Thanks to our work, we can benefit from the fruit of our efforts and freely invest the abundant product of our work, in an entrepreneurial capacity, using private property in a Christian way.

2) SECOND PURPOSE

To serve one's neighbour

We can imagine how Saint Joseph worked, how « a saint works », how he was conscientious in his work.

We have all had the experience of reaching out to someone whose work consisted of rendering us a service and realizing that the person did not see his work as a service but only as a way to earn money ; he wasn't interested in doing good but just doing what's in his own interest. When we think of Saint Joseph, we cannot imagine him performing his work « **by the book** » , to improve the lives of his fellow citizens. A work intended as a service to others, as a result of the natural solidarity unites us to one another.

For us Christians, it is about working in the charity that comes to us through the Holy Spirit, working with love, and with care, for the benefit of those who depend on our work⁸.

3) THIRD PURPOSE

Perfecting oneself on the human and professional level

The working man « learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself »⁹. Such development, if well assimilated, is more valuable than the external riches that one could accumulate.

The Holy Father, in *Patris Corde*, speaking of Saint Joseph the worker, underlines the drama of lack of work, which undermines the dignity of man.¹⁰

Indeed, Work is not only what is done on the side, detached from our person, but an element that contributes to the maturity of the person, to the increase of his level of expertise, of his professionalism, that brings him new abilities through which he develops a sense of personal accomplishment because of the acquired knowledge. For a Christian, the personal « improvement » produced through work « is the realization of supernatural perfection »¹¹ since through it we achieve our growth towards fullness in Christ¹².

⁸ « all that men do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, a more humane disposition of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. ». (GS 35)

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 35

¹⁰ « The loss of employment that affects so many of our brothers and sisters, and has increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, should serve as a summons to review our priorities. Let us implore Saint Joseph the Worker to help us find ways to express our firm conviction that no young person, no person at all, no family should be without work! » (*Patris Corde*, 6)

¹¹ JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, May 15, 1961, n. 237

¹² Eph 4,15-16

4) FOURTH PURPOSE **The union with his Lord**

Jesus learned from Saint Joseph to participate every Saturday – « as he was accustomed »¹³ - in listening to the Word of God in the synagogue. He put into practice the Lord's precept that, while entrusting man with the responsibility of work, he also commanded him not to work on the seventh day, for He rested on that day. For man, to stop working is equivalent to no longer providing for his subsistence, so that this weekly stop comes to mean that man recognizes that his life and his subsistence do not depend on his work, his efforts after all, but on the Lord. Thus we understand how important God was in the life of Saint Joseph: he worked to fulfill the will of God, who had wanted to make him the father of the family of Nazareth.

The Christian considers his work as a **call** from his Lord, who gives him faith, hope and charity to work WELL.

The Christian is called to live his work as a **vocation of union with the Lord in his work.**

1. To work is to **imitate** God.

Through his work, man continues and completes the work of creation¹⁴.

2. To work is to live one's « **fatigue** » with Christ.

Man, through his work, also "continues" the work of Redemption. Through all his fatigue and, in a certain sense, because of it, work is a good of man¹⁵ because he is touched by the Pascal Mystery¹⁶.

3. Work is an « **offering** » to God.

The role of the laity is to direct the goods of creation and human activity to God, in order to make them perfect in Christ, as we say at every Holy Mass when we present our offerings to the Lord: "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you : fruit of the earth and work (!) of human hands ».

¹³ The Gospel according to Luke tells us that Jesus « came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. » (*Lk 4,16*)

¹⁴ « man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator [...]. man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working » (LE, 25)

¹⁵ LE 9

¹⁶ « By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity. [...] 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 ». (LE 26-27)

4. Union with God **sanctifies** work.

Work does not have to produce a distance from God; on the contrary, union with the Lord makes the work we do become « holy ». Work is a path of sanctification.

5. Work is a « place » of **evangelization**.

Being a place of relationships, work is the **field in which to sow the Word of the Lord**, a favorable time to **bear witness** to the Gospel and to **evangelize** colleagues¹⁷.

CONCLUSION

PRATICAL ACTIVITY / 2

=> LET'S TAKE A FEW MINUTES FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Among the four purposes of work (to feed oneself, to serve others, to perfect oneself, to unite oneself to God) which one do you feel most advanced in?

Which one do you still need to work on?

Write them down.

(60 seconds of silence to reflect and write)

We can conclude by saying that work can become for each of us a "mystical place", that is, the place where the Lord is present, where we work with the Lord, in His presence, we work for Him. It is the Lord Jesus who makes our work holy and fruitful for the Kingdom of God.

Saint Joseph the worker, pray for us!

¹⁷ « united in mind and spirit with the divine Redeemer even when they are engaged in the affairs of the world, their work becomes a continuation of His work, penetrated with redemptive power. [...] Thus is man's work exalted and ennobled—so highly exalted that it leads to his own personal perfection of soul, and helps to extend to others the fruits of Redemption, all over the world. »

JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, 15 May 1961, n. 61-62