

Along the track

Why Work?

Sometimes it's hard to go to work, isn't it? We are tired, or apprehensive or we'd just rather do something else! If we don't see a purpose in what we are doing, work can be tough. It can become a grind, the same old thing day in, day out. No matter how good and exciting our job may be, there are times when it can become a bit monotonous. If we don't feel that our work has a purpose, that is valued, that we are not just a 'service or function,' as it were, then things can be tough.

In some theologies, work is seen as a punishment, something that came about after Adam's sin, not willed or intended by God. In this view, if there was no sin, there would be no work. But that view undervalues the dignity of work, it undervalues the sacredness of what work enables us to do, what it does for our own self-worth, what it does for the world we live in.

Our work is sacred, whatever it may be, however ordinary it may seem. Why sacred? Because work brings us into contact with God and God's vision for creation. Scripture reminds us often that we have been made in God's image and likeness. The first image of God that is revealed to us in the Bible is God, the Creator. We share in God's creativity, and we have been entrusted to bring God's vision for creation into reality in this time and in this place.

So what I do, in my own way, be that on a small 'stage' or large, is working to bring God's creation to fulfilment. Sometimes that is not so easy to see as what we are doing may seem a bit mundane but, no matter what we do, we share in God's vision to bring about a world in harmony and in peace. We continue the work of creation begun so long ago through our efforts, through our labours and in our hands today by growing things, building things, carving things, creating things, transporting things, cleaning things, painting things, writing things, raising children, nursing people, teaching, consoling, humouring, struggling along with others, and loving others.

We work, in our own way and in our own place, because we have been entrusted by God to care for each other and for creation, to work to complete what is unfinished, what has been left for us, to plan and develop, to invent and thus bring creation to its full potential. In the words of Sr Joan Chittister:

Co-creation, the human commitment to continue the work of God on earth, requires us to tend the land and conserve the waters, to till the garden and protect the animals, to use the things of the earth in ways that enhance all life now—and preserve them for later generations as well.” Our work, whatever it may be, however unimportant it may seem at times, is our way of being collaborators with God.

I read this story many years ago. A traveller went to Chartres in France to see the great church that was being built there. He arrived at the site just as the workmen were leaving for home. He asked a man, covered with dust, what he did there. The man replied that he was a stonemason. Another man, when asked, said he was a glassblower, who made slabs of coloured glass. Another said he was a blacksmith who pounded iron.

Wandering inside the unfinished edifice, the traveller came upon an older woman, armed with a broom, sweeping up the stone chips, wood shavings and glass shards from the day's work. “What are you doing?” he asked. The woman leaned on her broom, looked toward the high arches and replied, “Me? I'm building a cathedral for the glory of God.”

The person entrusted with what may have seemed the least important job was the only one who saw the big picture and her place in it. Do you ever take a moment to think about your vocation, what God is calling you to do in the here and now, in what you are doing? How do you share in God's creativity? What gifts and talents do you bring to this task, this endeavour? Do you see your work as part of God's ongoing act of creation? How are you helping to build harmony and peace? Do others feel glad that you work with them? Do you let them know how much you appreciate them and what they do? That's part of building harmony in creation too.

Regards
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