



UP TO THE SOURCE

MONTHLY WORDS

September: *Work—Fill the Earth and Subdue It*



Visit our St. John Paul II web page at stmarylitleton.org/stjohnpaul2.

A Working Seminarian

A well-known episode in the life of St. John Paul II, at that time Karol Wojtyła, was his work during the Nazi occupation of Poland in a quarry and a factory to earn a living and to avoid deportation to Germany. Karol Wojtyła started working at this location, just outside Krakow, on October 11, 1940, at first as a laborer in the Zakrzówek quarry, and then - from summer 1941 to August 1944 - as a worker in the water purification plant in the boiler room of the Solvay chemical factory. He worked mainly in night shifts, devoting his free time to reading and prayer. Part of that time it was as a seminarian (since the Fall of 1942). Years later, and even as a Pope, he would remember with gratitude the example and generosity of his fellow co-workers, with whom he stayed in touch for many years. At that time, he wrote some poems, which are the roots of his future teachings on human work:

*Listen: the even knocking of hammers,
so much their own,
I project on to the people
to test the strength of each blow.*

*Listen now: electric current
cuts through a river of rock.*

*And a thought grows in me day after day:
the greatness of work is inside man.*

(The Quarry: I; Matter, I)

Work in the Subjective Sense: The Human Being as the Subject of Work

When we talk about work, we tend to think in what we can produce, at home or at the workplace. That is right, and that is a sign of our being made in the image of God. However, another complementary

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element of work is how it transforms us into the likeness of God (Gn 1:27), it sanctifies us. Through work you transform and are transformed. St. John Paul II speaks of this on his Encyclical on human work *Laborem Exercens*:

And this "dominion" spoken of in the biblical text [...] refers not only to the objective dimension of work but at the same time introduces us to an understanding of its subjective dimension. Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself as the

one who “dominates”. This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than to the objective one: this dimension conditions the very ethical nature of work. In fact there is no doubt that human work has an ethical value of its own [...] the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person (LE 5).

Elements for a Spirituality of Work (*Laborem Exercens* 24–27)

- * The human activity in order to better the circumstances of men and women’s lives accords with God’s will.
- * Man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator, and it unfolds the Creator’s work.
- * It is both in working and also in resting that we ought to imitate God.
- * Even the most ordinary everyday activities are a participation in God’s activity.
- * Christ himself was a man of work: he belongs to the working world and looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes.
- * As Vatican II states, the norm of human activity is: “that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow people as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfil it” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 35).
- * The right meaning of progress is oriented to a greater justice, wider brotherhood and a more humane ordering of social relationships.
- * All work, whether manual or intellectual, is inevitably linked with toil. In enduring it, in union with Christ crucified, we can collaborate with Him 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”.

**Work:
Participation in
God’s creation.**

Practical Ideas to Live Your Work in Christ

1. Take care of transitions:

- o When you start your workday, offer it to the Lord with a prayer.
- o When you finish it, and are ready to resume your family life, make a conscious effort to leave everything behind and entrust it to the Lord.

2. Pray for co-workers, clients, people you work for. For example, one each week.
3. Consider how your work is an act of charity which contributes to the good of your family or society.
4. Consider the risks of any work: greed, envy, pride, careerism, frustration, gossip, laziness, disorder, procrastination, lack of vision, dishonesty, 'work alcoholism',... And some virtues: charity, determination, magnanimity, teamwork, honesty, patience, orderliness, companionship, creativity,...
5. Bible readings:
 - o The creation of man and woman: Gn 1:26-31
 - o The Lord is the one who gives fruit: Ps. 127.
 - o The work of Jesus: Mk 6:2-3; Mk 6:30-33; Jn 5:17.
 - o Trusting in the Providence: Mt 6:25-34.
 - o Parable of the talents: Mt 25:14-30.
 - o St. Paul against idleness: 2 Thes 3:6-16.

To Know More

1. St. John Paul II writings on Social Teachings of the Church:
 - o Encyclical Laborem exercens (1981): on human work.
 - o Encyclical Sollicitudo rei socialis (1987): on human development.
 - o Encyclical Centesimus annus (1991): on contemporaneous political and economic issues.
2. Catechism of the Catholic Church:
 - o Participation in Social Life: 1897-1927.
 - o Social Justice: 1928-1948.
 - o The Seventh Commandment: 2401-2463

The Spirituality of Work

God, Our Father, work is your gift to us. A call to reach new heights by using our talents for the good of all. Guide us as we work and teach us to live in the Spirit that has made us your Sons and Daughters, in the love that has made us brothers and sisters.