

Spirituality of Work

In ancient Greek and Roman cultures, slaves worked and freemen did not. Strenuous and backbreaking work was seen as beneath the dignity of free people and therefore expected of slaves.

The ancient Jewish world answered that with a work ethic flowing from their relationship with God. The Israelites learned that God himself worked – the loving Father worked “for seven days” bringing to life all that exists. Moreover, God’s creation was both a gift and a task. God’s creation was to be valued, developed, and worked to meet the needs of everyone in the community. All work contributing to the good of all contained its own dignity and worth. There was no shame in hard work; rather work was honorable and honored.

Sharing completely in our human condition, Jesus worked as a carpenter in his foster father’s shop. By the sweat of his own labors, He raised human work to a higher level of dignity. When he emerged from the River Jordan following his baptism, Jesus began, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the work of proclaiming and revealing The Kingdom of God. His teachings, miracles, parables and gathering of disciples were fruits of this work. His death on the cross and Resurrection was the supreme work of redemption for all humanity and all creation.

Through our baptism, our daily lives are also consecrated, through the indwelling Spirit, to proclaim and reveal the Kingdom of God in our midst. We obviously do this through our life of prayer, Eucharist, works of charity and actions of justice. But we are also called to reveal God’s Kingdom in all our “daily work.”

In our “daily work”, Jesus walks by each of us and says, “Come after me and I will make you raise a family for God and care for a wider family beyond common blood.” “Come after me, and I will make your voice advocate for those left outside the common good.” “Come after me, and I will make you hearts of compassion, voices of justice, and hands of solidarity.”

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church is a separate catechism developed by The Vatican consolidating Catholic Social Teaching in one volume. Issued in 2005, the *Compendium* has extensive teachings on the value of daily human work. Below are some excerpts from the section “Jesus, A Man of Work.”

“In his preaching, Jesus teaches that we should appreciate work. He himself, having ‘become like us in all things, devoted most of the years of his life on earth to *manual work* at the carpenter's bench’ in the workshop of Joseph.” (*Compendium* #259)

“Human activity aimed at enhancing and transforming the universe can and must unleash the perfections which find their origin and model in the uncreated Word... In this way — that is, bringing to light in ever-greater measure ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’, in creation, human work becomes a service raised to the grandeur of God.” (*Compendium* #262)

“Work represents a fundamental dimension of human existence as participation not only in the act of creation but also in that of redemption. Those who put up with the difficult rigors of work in union with Jesus cooperate, in a certain sense, with the Son of God in his work of redemption and show that they are disciples of Christ bearing his cross, every day, in the activity they are called to do.” (*Compendium* #263)

*A bulletin insert for the [Bread of Life Discourse homily series](https://www.usccb.org/committees/clergy-consecrated-life-vocations/preaching-resources/spirituality-of-work)
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