

Joseph the Worker

Today is a beautiful feast in that we hold up St. Joseph, the model of workers, and the great dignity of work. Pope Pius XII instituted this feast in 1955 in response to the "May Day" celebrations for workers sponsored by Communists.

Essentially, the Holy Father was saying, "We are the champions of the working man, the poor, and the great dignity of life." Without God, one cannot not truly understand the dignity of the person nor protect the inalienable rights given to him or her by God.

In terms of work, we know that it is good. God commanded the first man to "till and keep" the garden. Obviously, work is much more difficult after the fall.

None the less, it is still good! This is for a couple of reasons. First, it is through work that we participate in God's creative work. God certainly doesn't need us. However, He wills that we participate – to share in – His creative activity. This is a great blessing. I think of a child that asks mom or dad, "Can I help?" "Sure, you can help."

Additionally, work is good because it shapes us as human beings. It is in and through work that we develop our skills. People who are out of work are frustrated not just because of the lack of income, but also because their talents and skills are not being developed.

Furthermore, it's through work that we in some sense impress ourselves upon things we make or the services that we provide. This is why an artist will stand back and take in his or her painting or sculpture once it is finished. God Himself "stood back" after each creative act and said, "And behold, it is good."

Finally, we value work because it unites us more closely to Joseph, who Himself worked with His hands. We can imagine Joseph in the wood shop or cutting stone teaching the child Jesus.

On this feast of St. Joseph the Worker, let us be grateful for the gift of work and for St. Joseph. Let us also remember to pray for all who work to support their families, and for those who are unemployed and underemployed. St. Joseph, pray for us!