For Personal Reflection

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1. How do I feel about work?
2. How do I feel about my job?
3. Do I see the value of work? Do I see God in whatever work—paid—or unpaid—in which I am engaged?
4. Are there ways in which I need to improve my appreciation of work?
5. Are there ways in which I need to better integrate my experience of work or labor with the other aspects of my life?
6. Does work have a role to play in my spiritual journey?
7. How might I need to have a more positive view or attitude toward my place(s) of work?

Further Reading

Gregory F. A Pierce. spiritual-ity@work: 10 ways to balance your life on-the-job. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001.

Michael O'Neill McGrath. Patrons and Protectors: More Occupations. Hong Kong: Palace Press, 2002

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Work...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

...Our Lot in Life

In his book Spirituality@Work, Gregory Pierce observes: "Popular culture presents work as, at best, a tedious distraction and, at worst, a "rat race" in which—in the words of comedian Lily Tomlin— "even if you win you're still a rat." (Chapter 1, page 18)

Work, it seems, has become a four-letter word. Gregory Pierce concludes that "for most people work is alienating, oppressive, exhausting—anything but spiritual." (*Ibid*)

Is work nothing more than a punishment? Is work nothing more than a burden? If so, how can work possibly play any part in—pardon the expression—the working out of our salvation?

"Work is all the effort (paid or unpaid) that we exert to make the world a better place..."

"Perhaps one reason for this unfortunate dichotomy is that, when we think of holy men and women throughout the ages, we often recall sculptures, drawings and paintings in which the saints look anything but active. Our most active and energetic saints are sometimes pictured doing nothing more strenuous than holding a lily or gazing piously heavenward. And while these images can be moving and inspiring, and helpful for times of contemplation, if one is searching for models of action and energy, they can hold somewhat less appeal." (James Martin, SJ in Patrons and Protectors: More Occupations by Michael O'Neill McGrath)

Consider the possibility that it is our understanding of work that is the problem, not work itself.

"Popular culture presents work as, at best, a tedious distraction and, at worst, a 'rat race'."

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines work as "physical or mental effort or activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something...something that one is doing, making or performing, especially as an occupation or undertaking; a duty or task."

By this definition, all of us work. Throughout all our lives we are working on tasks, responsibilities, opportunities, hopes, dreams and relationships. On any given day, at any given moment—young or old, active or retired, salaried or volunteer—we are all engaged in some kind of undertaking, be it great or small.

It is in this light that James Martin writes that "perhaps the most overlooked fact from Christian history is that Jesus worked. We can easily envision Jesus being instructed by Saint Joseph, the master carpenter. In Joseph's workshop in Nazareth Jesus would have learned about the raw materials of his craft...Joseph would have taught his apprentice the right way to drive a nail with a hammer, to drill a clean, deep hole in a plank, to level a ledge or a lintel." (*Ibid*)

Can we not see how the skills of a craftsman—patience, diligence, perseverance, honesty and others—would later serve Jesus well in his greatest work, that of accomplishing the will of God by proclaiming the Kingdom of God?

Gregory Pierce suggests that we need to see and experience work as "all the effort (paid or unpaid) we exert to make the world a better place, a little closer to the way God would have things." (Spirituality@Work, page 18)

"How can work play any part in the working out of our salvation?"

Our God is the God of Creation. We are called to reflect the image and likeness of this creating God. We accomplish this most clearly when we work to make our world, our offices, our neighborhoods and our homes places that more perfectly mirror the justice and peace of God.

Work—God's work—is indeed our lot in life, our reason for being, our purpose for living. As we see in the life of Jesus himself, this work can be tiring, laborious and frustrating. Still, what could be more rewarding than using all of our energies to make all our little corners of the world more reflective of the Kingdom of God?

Come on! There's work to do!