

My friends in Christ, several years ago, my best friend from seminary – who is now a priest for the Archdiocese of Washington, DC: Father Stephen Wyble.... He was finishing his studies in the seminary in Rome. The year before he finished, I was blessed with an opportunity to visit him, and we basically made it a week-long pilgrimage throughout the city of Rome. We chose a day for us to take a bullet-train north to the ancient city of Milan. And it was *fast*...but, sadly...basically it was boring. Anyway, we got to Milan. And of any city in northern Italy that we *might* have visited, we chose Milan for two reasons. One, the vista; the city is situated beautifully in a half-ring of the Italian Alps, and it was going to be a spectacular sight. Two, the cathedral.

Well...it was raining and utterly clouded over, so we struck out *totally* on the *first* reason for having gone to Milan! But what we missed out on with the beautiful vista...we *more* than made up for with the cathedral.

The cathedral of Milan is one of the most recognizable architectural structures in the whole world. If you were to google-search “Milan cathedral,” then I bet that you would recognize it. It is white marble, an imposing A-frame basilica with spires across the façade; it is the largest sample of Italian Gothic architecture, standing taller than every other building in the central *piazza* of the city.

Now, when it was built (*centuries* ago), of course it was a different era then, and there was not the modern advancements in technology to *do* a whole lot. But *now*, we enjoy *many* developments in technology – including *elevators*. And the cathedral in Milan has installed an elevator for tourists and pilgrims to gain access to the roof – something that was not possible through much to the existence of this impressive structure. Why do I mention *that*? Because when my friend and I went up to the roof, we got to see statues and engravings and other incredible works of art that perhaps not even a hundred years ago *nobody* could have seen. Precious works of timeless art – *hundreds* and *hundreds* of them, by the way! – which as far as the original architects, masons, and sculptors knew would *never* be seen by *anyone* – and *yet*...they made them *anyway*! And *why* would they do this? Why bother to spend all of that time, money, and effort to make something that *nobody* would *ever* see? Well, I for one *have* to believe that it was a holy endeavor of human artistry undertaken *purely* for the love and glory of God.... Even if no *human* would ever see such work...*God* sees them...and *that* is enough.

Now...not all of us are artists, that is true...but we *are* all of us workers. But I suspect that the vast majority of our work probably is *never* observed by anybody. And *yet*, does this fact permit us free license to slack off, settling with mere lackluster and useless junk? God forbid! For at *least* the last century-and-a-half, the Church has been the *constant* promoter and defender not *only* of the *dignity* of work...but even of its *sanctity*.

One of the very first commandments that God gave to Adam and Eve (*before* the Fall, while they were still in the Paradise of Eden, and neither sin nor death, nor any *other* punishment incurred because of the Fall, was as yet a reality) was to “*cultivate and care for*” the Garden. Or, in *other* words: *work*.... Much later on, we have the foster-father of Jesus Himself, Saint Joseph, upheld as a model of the goodness, the dignity, and the sanctity of a hard day’s work.... And of course, we have Jesus Himself – Who, yes, spent *three* years preaching and teaching, healing and dying...but Who *also* was like any other child whose business was play, but Who, like *all* Jewish boys, was working by the age of *twelve*.... Twelve years a boy at play; three years the Messiah...and *eighteen* years – the lion’s share of His earthly life – working hard, unnoticed by almost *everyone*, as a carpenter.... Therefore, if *work* is good enough for the *Lord*...it is good enough for *us*. And if *nothing* else, the reason *why* we work, again, *ultimately* is (or *should* be, anyway) for the love and glory of God.

And God blesses us with a great abundance – both *in* our work and *for* our work. Consider the various Scripture passages that are given us today. The Prophet Isaiah speaks to us of the Lord *delighting* in us, *rejoicing* in us – and thus are we endowed with God’s love for us. And “in this is love: not that we have loved God, but that [God] loved us” *first*. Saint John says that. Love is, *first* of all, *God’s* initiative – and it is God’s love that inspires us and energizes us to do *anything*.... And *hopefully* that which we are inspired and energized to do is love God in *return*, which we *certainly* can do – get this! – in our *work*. Love for God, expressed in our *faith* in God, is demonstrated by our works; yet faith *without* works is dead. Saint James says that.

Saint Paul today lists just some of the spiritual works to which many of us are called: “gifts of healing...mighty deeds...prophecy...discernment of spirits...varieties of tongues.” But perhaps we view that *particular* list and despair that we are called to *none* of those things. No worries! As we

know, Jesus spent only *three* years of His earthly life going about the holy works of the Messiah; the *rest* was devoted to the normal goings-on of the normal work-a-day life. Simply the living of life in the context of culture or society is enough. Yes, true, some of us *are* called to these spiritual works for the love of God, the glory of the Kingdom...*and*...*most* of us are called just to keep doing what we do but with greater intention of spirit and heightened devotion to the Lord. Jesus “chooses us where we are, and leaves us – the majority of [us]...just where we were: in our family, in our own job...so that in the very environment in which we are found, we should love Him and make Him known through family ties, through relationships at work, and among friends.” Because what we might deride as a merely *ordinary* life in fact is *not* boring and dull; again, the *ordinary* life is the *very* place where God wants the majority of us to achieve the holy greatness to which we are called.

And just as Jesus went about His daily work through the lion’s share of His earthly life with great joy and a whole-hearted love for what He did, so we, too, are called upon to love our work; it is impossible, otherwise, for the dignity and the sanctity of our work fully to flourish and bear fruit in the midst of a fallen, broken world that *desperately* yearns for God’s grace and our good example.

There is *something* – perhaps the great and mysterious something *we-know-not-what*...that God sees in our normal, run-of-the-mill lives which sing of love and glory. And we need not feel like we absolutely *must* do great things for the Lord in order to demonstrate our love for Him and thus give Him glory...but, as Saint Teresa of Kolkata says, we can do small things but with great love.

And so, you need not build the cathedral of Milan for the love and glory of God; building a sandbox for your children and grandchildren can do that just fine. You need not compose a grand, operatic symphony in the epic manner of Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Mass in b-minor* so as to proclaim the Gospel to the concert-going audiences of the world; composing just a small prayer to pray with your kids at bed-time is all you need to proclaim the Gospel to them in *their* world. And *I, certainly*, do not need to be a bishop or the pope to know the Lord’s love for me and to know that God has chosen me. Believe me! Being a parish priest is *more* than enough!

We always must be mindful of the beautiful and glorious truth of the dignity and sanctity of our works. Our work has dignity...and *we* have dignity *in* our work. And as for sanctity: if only we

would invite God *into* our work, thus to *sanctify* our work, then we will find that our work, in turn, has the power and is infused with God's grace to sanctify *us*. Saint Josemaría Escrivá teaches us:

A Christian should do all honest human work...with the greatest perfection possible; with human perfection (professional competence), and with Christian perfection (for love of God's will and as a service to [humanity]). Human work done in this manner, no matter how humble or insignificant it may seem, helps to shape the world in a Christian way. The world's divine dimension is made more visible, and our human labor is thus incorporated into the marvelous work of Creation and Redemption. It is raised to the order of grace. It is sanctified and becomes God's work....

Last thing.... Again, consider Jesus Himself. In our Gospel passage today from Saint John, we are given the story of the wedding feast at Cana. Here is where the mere *earthly* work of the Son of the carpenter *ends* and where the great *heavenly* work of the Messiah, the Son of God, *begins*: Jesus changes the water into wine...but He did so only *after* the wedding servers did *their* work *first*. They could not *possibly* have known what was going to happen...but they did their work *anyway*...and the Lord blessed its dignity...sanctified it...*glorified* it: the water became wine. And consider *wine*, what it *means*; throughout *much* of Sacred Scripture, wine frequently is symbolic of the joy of our lives. If *only* we would invite the Lord *into* our work, thus to *sanctify* our work...if *only* we would just let Him *in*...then, again, our normal daily work – and *we ourselves* – will become all the more dignified...and sanctified...and filled *utterly* to the *brim* with great joy.... May it be, then, that in all of our works, in all that we do, whether they be perceived by *all* or else seen by *no one* at all...we will do *all* of it with great intention of spirit...and with a heightened devotion to the Lord...*all* of it for the salvation of souls...and for the love and glory of God.