

I must confess that while previewing the scriptures for this Sunday, I barely made it past the opening line of our first reading! Job reminded me the cartoon character who perpetually had a rain cloud hovering over his head. Still, his words resonate in the hearts of even the strongest believers. He is giving voice to our experience, even when we prefer not to admit it. In today's passage he said, "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?"

The dictionary defines the word "drudgery" as "dull, irksome and fatiguing work." Apparently, it is of Middle English origin. The first two words of the definition made sense; yet adding "fatiguing work" at the end was disappointing. Why is work so easily associated with drudgery? There is no shame in hard work, but in fact virtue.

Perhaps you have heard the saying, "If hard work were really a virtue, then mules would be saints."¹ Yet, it really misses the point about the dignity of work found within Catholic Social teaching. Hard work without some ideal is just drudgery, but if combined with some ideal, it becomes noble. Our Catechism teaches it can also be redemptive:

By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish.²

Viewing hard work as "virtuous" does not happen overnight. It takes time for this to develop. In one text, St. Thomas Aquinas discussed **virtue** at some length, noting that we need such **habits** for three primary reasons:

¹ Attributed to a James Dee Richards

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 2427

“First, for steadfastness in our operation... Second, we need them to perform a perfect operation readily... Third, we need virtuous habits to bring our perfect activity to fulfillment pleurably.”³ Thus, when we act resolutely, and act without hesitation, we will reach fulfillment.

That’s right- he says that good habits bring pleasure, as in the satisfaction of a job well done, a term paper well researched, a math problem with which you struggle, but finally comprehend. That brings with it an incredible sense of satisfaction, making it worth the struggle. As St. Thomas put it, ‘A disposition becomes a habit, just as a boy becomes a man.’⁴ It takes time and constant reinforcement.

If children are brought up thinking that work is merely to be tolerated, they will take on that attitude from the get-go. In some ways, perhaps my parents tricked us, presenting chores as family time, or as challenges to be conquered: “How quickly can we rake the leaves?” Or, “Let’s see who can get the radiator the cleanest?” We weren’t bribed to do chores; it was part and parcel of what was expected. They were never colored in a negative tone, even though I soon realized the mundane nature of chores.

It is virtuous to put in a hard day of work at home, whether in school, at the office or at home. Most importantly, as Pope John Paul II wrote in his 1981 encyclical on the value of Human Work, “Work is for man, not man for work.”⁵ The human person is both author and beneficiary. Through work, people should be able to draw the means for providing for one’s family. This is why a living wage for families is so critical.

The key point here is that man is the subject of labor, not the object. We are neither cogs in a machine, nor merely instruments of production. We are subjects, invited to contribute in a real and substantive way to the development of society and the building up of the Kingdom.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues in General*, Reply to Art. 1

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III Q. 49 Art. 2, ad. 3

⁵ Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter *Laborem Exercens*, 14 September 1981, paragraph #6

Life does not have to be drudgery. It is an adventure, sometimes grueling, sometimes tedious, but never without its drama and rewards. Best of all, it is a journey towards the loving arms of our Redeemer, who awaits with joy our loving response of “Yes” to His invitation to join the banquet of Life in the Kingdom. There all our work finds its fulfillment in the place prepared for us by the Father.