

Year of the Living Word

What do you do: reflecting Christ's light while we work

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We have all asked the question "what do you do," or another comparable question, and the answers are usually the stock answers of something such as "I am a student," "I work in sales," or "I stay at home with the kids."

Answering the question tells us something about the kind of work another is responsible for and what they accomplish in this task. There is nothing wrong with asking someone these kinds of questions, but this was never the way that Jesus approached a conversation with others. His interest always went much deeper, and if we take the time to explore his conversations in Scripture, we will find that we have much to learn from them as we try to live the word of God.

Whenever Jesus conversed with another person, he did so with great respect for the dignity of that person. He saw in the other person something eternal, something holy. What Jesus saw in others during his short time on earth is what he sees in each of us — the reflection of his own divinity.

As we focus on living the word of God in our daily lives and we reflect on

the life and teachings of Jesus, we need to have a good understanding of the importance of who we are and why we do what we do.

When we define others by who they are, rather than what they do, we are able to see them with the eyes of Christ. Of course this is easier said than done. When the ever-annoying co-worker seems to always bother us at the wrong time, it isn't easy to see them as the child of God they are. When the teenage child talks back to or even worse, simply ignores, a parent, it is very difficult to see him as a son of God. But, whether we see it or not, this is the reality of who every human being is — a child of God. Each person is created as good and meant for an eternal and wonderful purpose, whether we (or they) see it or not.

Genesis 1:27-28 says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the

ground.'"

Here we see the dominion over creation that God has given to humanity. Not only are we stewards of creation, but we are also to labor in order to "subdue" the earth. From this it follows that there is an intimate connection between human work and self-fulfillment in imaging God. In our act of subduing the earth — our work — we image God's act of making the world.

But, in the way we work, we certainly don't always reflect the glory of God, at least I don't (don't forget I work for the church). If we are to reconcile the biblical fact that we are made in God's image to do his work in the world, then we need to recapture some of the original glory of the Garden of Eden. We are made to serve others, but the meaning of serving others in our work is reduced

to nothing if we do not serve with the right intentions. To evoke this mindset, let us examine where we are presently.

We must ask ourselves how we view our work, is our work something we do grudgingly or cheerfully, is our work a time of

service or is it just labor? Once we know our motives, we can move to purify them in God's grace.

John Paul the Great elegantly writes about work in one particularly moving passage in his encyclical on work. He says, "By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity." (LE, 27)

Christ endured the cross and we are to endure our cross of toil. By doing so, we participate in the redemptive work of Christ. But, that isn't all. When we work for the right purpose and with the right intentions, we can "fully become 'God's fellow workers' and co-workers for his kingdom." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 307)

After this understanding of work changes our identity, the next time we are asked "what do you do?" we can answer with all sincerity — "I work for God's Kingdom to become holy and serve others in order to bring glory to Christ's name." Lord, make it so.

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