

A MODERN MASTER IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF WORK

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The archbishop of Vienna and general editor of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* stresses that, in the light of the teachings of Blessed Josemaría the work world must become more human.

WORK HAS existed since man was created. Even before the fall “the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen. 2: 15).

Although work is of the essence of human life, it is accompanied by unpleasantness. Not just in the brutal form of exploitation of physical and psychological resources, but also in the supposedly humane professional world of rich societies. Everyday work is threatened by cost savings, lay offs, re-organizations; it takes so much of man’s energies that no free space remains for family and personal development; work for many means stress and exhaustion.

The answer to the question: “What is all this for?” has been lost. In practice, a pragmatism prevails, an intrusion into daily life of management theories: work is legitimized by success; and absent an objective standard defining success, success becomes whatever others call it (money, career, prestige).

Everyday work is for many a constant strain: either they succeed in gaining power or they find themselves manipulated. Thus not seldom does fear rule the workplace – or it comes to workaholism, to an ‘idolatry of occupation’

with fatal consequences for personal and family life. A ‘human ecology of work’ is necessary, for which Christianity has produced great teachers.

One of them is Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, who was born 100 years ago on January 9, 1902, and who founded Opus Dei in 1928. Going beyond off-target, church-politics clichés, he can be called one of the most influential modern masters in the spirituality of work. He perceived in a new way that each person in his place and in his supposedly unimpressive profession or trade can participate in creation and redemption, as many had long thought only clerics could do.

And not only that: he also made clear that work is not a punishment from God.

Blessed Josemaría’s writings give us a helping hand to regain “unity of life”. In his main work, *The Way*, he wrote: “An hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer” (no. 335). But work must not ‘devour’ man. The need today is to humanize work. This will succeed only if God and the ultimate horizons of our lives are connected in a union that gives meaning to life. If the goal of work were only ‘success’ or na-

ked self-realization, it would indeed be senseless. For this reason, Blessed Josemaría gave particular emphasis to the serving professions (nursing, homemaking, social work). Or as the German publicist Hans Thomas once put it: "The Christian works first to serve, then also to earn. The latter creates the economic worth, the former the human dignity of work."

The humanizing of work is a consequence, not a condition of sanctifying it. Can one become holy today? Although every serious Christian should

affirm it, Blessed Josemaría perhaps more than others, with a bold concreteness, challenges that in the middle of the street, in the humdrum of daily life – particularly in the work world – every person can aim for this goal. Much remains to be discovered and put into practice. Or in Blessed Josemaría's words:

Get rid of that 'small-town' outlook. Enlarge your heart till it becomes universal, 'catholic'. Don't flutter about like a hen, when you can soar to the heights of an eagle!" (*The Way* 7)