



A painting on a panel of a 19th-century beehive from Slovenia depicts Jesus and St. Joseph at work in carpentry. (Wikimedia Commons/Museum of Apiculture, Radovljica)



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In the liturgical calendar of the church, St. Joseph is among the few saints recognized with multiple feasts. Even as we observe the solemnity of St. Joseph on March 19, we already look forward to his memorial on May 1. On that day, Catholics around the world will acknowledge him under the title of St. Joseph the Worker. This year sees a special kind of anticipation for this memorial as it intentionally coincides with the Jubilee of Workers.

Among all the expressions of humanity that might be celebrated this Jubilee year, why include a Jubilee of Workers? In the midst of our spiritually famished culture, the church is asking us to revitalize those ancient words, *Ite ad Joseph* — "Go to Joseph." Just as pharaoh prompted the starving people of Egypt to go to Joseph, the church now prompts us to turn to St. Joseph to reflect anew on the dignity of work.

Call to mind the last time someone smiled and beamed with glee when you asked, "How was work today?" While such occasions do happen, for most the instances are few and far between. Rather, it is all too easy to be reminded by our daily endeavors that work is a curse of the fall. Or is it?

Many might imagine man's pre-sin Edenic state as being blissfully free from work. How else would Adam have all that time to wander the gardens with God? It can be hard to see the dignity of work in our post-industrial stratified world where work life, family life, faith life and leisure are independent domains with little cohesive dependence.

Yet, in Genesis, we see the sanctifying nature of work inherent to man even before the fall as God commands mankind to till and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15). In fact, a few verses prior demonstrate that God's created order is deficient and incomplete without man's work for "there was no one to till the ground" (Genesis 2:5). Work is not a curse of the fall; it is the blessing of man imago Dei ([Laborem Exercens](#)).

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Even now, though, when tilling has turned to toiling, we find our labor has sanctifying power. The church has long understood and taught this: "Even had man never fallen from the state of innocence, he would not have remained wholly idle;

but that which would then have been his free choice and his delight became afterwards compulsory, and the painful expiation for his disobedience" ([*Rerum Novarum*](#)).

It is fitting then that we find jubilation in recalling this twofold grace of the Gospel of work: "that by means of work man participates in the activity of God himself, his Creator" and that "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" (*Laborem Exercens*).

The example of Joseph

Having come to understand this Gospel of work, how do we live it? Let us look to Joseph. We go to Joseph. The carpenter from Nazareth, called to be "the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father" ([*Patris Corde*](#)), typifies what our response should be in countless ways, but three in particular stand out.

First, and perhaps most obviously, is to *labor in service*.

We know that Joseph was a carpenter who used his skill to provide for the Holy Family. If his products were subpar and shoddy, then Jesus would have gone hungry. If he shirked his duty to cultivate his craft, Mary would have gone without a home. If he had chosen to cut corners for cost savings, then families in Judea would have risked their lives under his stingily built roofs. Instead, we see in Joseph that "work is a means ... to develop our talents and abilities, and to put them at the service of society" (*Patris Corde*).

Second, is to *labor in silence*.

It is often cited that Joseph does not speak in the Gospels. Rather, he prefigures Paul's exhortation: "For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living" (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12).



A painting of St. Joseph and Jesus is seen as Pope Francis arrives for an audience at the Vatican with members of Italy's National Confederation of Craft Trades and Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises Nov. 15, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Few people had more reason to complain ("Now to Egypt?!?"), more opportunity to gossip ("Mary's cousin is mute!"), more justification to brag ("That's my boy! He's literally perfect."). Yet Joseph's example is to work humbly and quietly, in thinking and doing. He teaches us to live our vocation, as Pope Francis [put it](#), in "an industrious silence."

Thirdly, aligned with this Jubilee year, Joseph provides an example to *labor in hope*.

As we read in the part on labor in the Rule of St. Benedict, "Idleness is the enemy of the soul." St. Aquinas quotes Jerome similarly, saying of monasteries they "are wont to admit none unless they work or labor, not so much for the necessities of life, as for the welfare of the soul." Idleness can never bear fruit; its ends are aimless and therefore devoid of hope.

Through the life of Joseph, we see time and time again his work as filled with hope for his own salvation and for that of mankind. Seeing our work as a means of developing virtue cultivates those same heavenly habits of St. Joseph the Worker.

As we enter more deeply into this Jubilee, it may be tempting to dismiss our reflections on Joseph and work as disconnected from your own jobs. However, Pope Benedict XVI [reminds](#) us that Joseph is a model for all: "May Christians, looking at this great Saint, learn to witness in every working environment to the love of Christ, the source of true solidarity and lasting peace."