

## A CATHOLIC VISION OF WORK

### 1. Work is defined as any productive activity we do

- What feelings do many people often get when they think of work?
- What feelings do people usually associate with spiritual experiences?
- Why the dichotomy between the two?

### 2. Our Catholic faith/spirituality at its foundation is a way of seeing, recognizing God's presence in all of life, including work.

### 3. If we view work through the lens of faith, what do we see?

- A call and a mission to partner with God in exercising dominion (not domination) over the earth, "to cultivate and care for it" (stewardship)- Genesis 1: 28 and 2: 15.
- The fundamental call/vocation -- to listen to God, to be our best selves -- who God created us to be, to be obedient to his direction.
- The fundamental mission -- to use the gifts and attractions God gave us to make a positive difference in the world (to further the reign of God, to do God's will).
- A recognition that sin, a falling out of right relationship, alienates us from ourselves, from God, from one another, from our work --Genesis 3.
- A belief that all of salvation history, beginning with creation, is the story of God's redeeming love which becomes fully expressed in and through Jesus -- all the dimensions of our lives, including work, are redeemed as we open up to God's loving, healing, reconciling presence.
- An experience of covenant as the foundation of relationships and work (contrasted with notion of contract) — Exodus.
- A challenge by the prophets to be just in all our works.

- The example of Jesus seeing his primary work as doing the Father's will, furthering the reign of God (God's loving and reconciling presence within humanity) -- John 4:34 and John 19:30, Jesus as the servant leader -- John 13: 3-15.
- Jesus' call to his disciples to follow his example, to be good and honest stewards -- to have a servant's heart, to be willing to sacrifice for what is right and just, for the good of others -- Matthew 25. Implications for our inner attitudes, ethical decision-making, and outer actions in the world of work.
- St. Paul's reminder that we ultimately work for the Lord – Ephesians 6:7, that we are part of one another as the Body of Christ, that we are ambassadors of reconciliation.
- Doing good work understood as a way of gratefully giving back to God, who has first loved us -- not a way of winning God's approval.

#### **4. Church teaching focuses on the spirituality of work -- given full expression in an encyclical written by Pope John Paul II in 1981 – Laborem Exercens**

- Considers the idea of a new civilization based upon the spirituality of work.
- Work is meaningful and just only when the human person's worth is fully valued, when the worker's dignity has priority over productivity.
- Economic profit is necessary and justifiable but never at the expense of human dignity.
- Work is meant to have a personal, family, and societal value.
- Human activity is an essential ingredient in the building of the earth and the reign of God.
- Work is a means by which people can grow in union with God and participate in the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ, a specific way of dying to oneself and rising as a more God centered and other centered person.
- People of faith are called to exercise their spirituality within the context of their daily lives, including work.
- To live in God's presence at work with awareness, integrity, justice and love is the essence of the spiritual life.
- Work ought to be available to people in such a way that basic human rights and duties are protected and promoted -- the call to justice in the world of work.

- Work is not only for private gain, work is an essential force to achieve the common good.
- Work has the potential to build community by uniting people into a powerful solidarity.
- Work is an opportunity to partner with God in bringing about "a new heaven and a new earth."

**5. It makes a profound difference how we view our work: whether we look at our work only as a career or through the eyes of faith as even more --a vocation/calling.**

**Career emphasis**

- Marketing one's own talents for personal gain
- Striving to get ahead
- Focus on oneself
- Virtues are often competition, power
- The ultimate goal -- personal success

**Vocation/calling emphasis**

- Using one's gifts to create a better world
- Making a difference through personal dedication
- Focus on community, common good
- Virtues are cooperation and servant leadership
- The ultimate goal -- being faithful to God's loving will in contributing to humanity/to the reign of God

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What speaks to you personally concerning this teaching on the spirituality of work?
2. Have you seen or could you see your work (activity) as a call, as spiritual? Why or why not?
3. What if beginning this week you did your work with a conscious and consistent awareness of God's loving and guiding presence? How would this influence what you do, how you do it, why you do it?
4. How can you practically integrate this teaching more deeply into your overall spiritual awareness and your life at work?