

Prayer at Work at Work

Aside from praying in school, my first memory of praying at work is as a caddy at a local golf course—this was before golf carts. I caddied for a number of golfers who were very generous in their profanity. For some reason it bothered me and I resolved to recite a counter prayer, “Blessed be the name of God” for a “G__ d__ it,” and “Blessed be the name of Jesus,” for a “J__ C_____!!!!” Frequent repetition quickly ingrained a lifetime habit.

The point of sharing this recollection is that prayer can easily be part of our workday, our work lives. Certainly, Sunday is the day designated for liturgical prayer and worship. Also, we have practices of praying upon rising and at bed time and prayers before meals and after meals. We are taught and urged to pray daily with verbal prayers, such as the rosary, and in meditation and contemplation. But this is not the end of praying. St. Paul admonished the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) these are “rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer” (2698).

Continual prayer and praying without ceasing do not mean except when at work or school. But how are we to do it? How do we pray at work or to make our work a prayer? I think it begins with a resolution, a decision, that I will make prayer part of all aspects of my life including work. We know that God is always present for us although we frequently do not make ourselves present to God. The task then is to remind ourselves to be present to God, that is, to identify or create reminders to pray. For me, as a caddy, it was a golfer’s cursing. I have seen some who have created a screen saver for their computer that is a bible verse or other phrase or picture that reminds them to put themselves into God’s presence by a moment’s reflection or a short prayer. Another person, whose phone rings very frequently, says a short prayer as she reaches to pick up the phone.

One of my brothers shared his practice of asking his guardian angel to help him out going into meetings. He prayed that his angel would interact with the angels of the other participants of the meeting to prepare all participants for a productive meeting.

In one place that I worked, I knew of a co-worker who prayed openly and frequently during the day. When I had a particularly difficult conference coming up, I would seek her out and jointly pray for help in dealing with the situation. We also joined in thanksgiving when the conference went well.

But even these prayer moments in our daily work lives do not make for “ceaseless prayer.” The only way to make prayer ceaseless would seem to be to make every act of our days, every breath, every heartbeat a prayer. To accomplish this takes us to the center of prayer. We must compose our hearts (CCC, 2699); we must desire; we must will that every element of our lives be dedicated to expressing love, God’s love, for us and for all creatures and objects in his creation. We do our work to the best of our ability because it goes to and affects one or more persons we love. In serving those in our workplace with loving care, we are serving our loving God; we are praying.

We need liturgical prayer and devotional prayer as well as private prayer (verbal, meditative, or contemplative) to nourish our ceaseless prayer life. We do not substitute our work or our prayers while working for the community prayer of the liturgy and/or for private or devotional prayers. Rather our work as prayer and our prayers at work are an outgrowth or maturation of our liturgical, devotional, and private prayer lives.

PRAYER — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of prayer in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of prayer in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of prayer in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based prayer in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?