

Why Our Work Matters

When we were kids, we were probably asked the question “what do you want to be when you grow up?” Some of us are doing what we said we’d do in third grade. But as we age, no matter whether we are doing what we always wanted, or ended up doing another job, sometimes it can be hard to see the difference we make in our jobs. On top of that, sometimes we may look at them as quite hard too. But most of us do them despite the challenges of schooling and training, and the ongoing effort a job requires. So why?

More and more today we live in an incredibly busy world. People often work jobs that weren’t their first choice; they have families to care for and more work after their work day ends; some are students who go to school to get work handed to them for which they pay tuition to receive, only to have to rush to an after-school job and go home to do more work. And then we get the job and find there’s busy work, office gossip, mundane aspects to the job, or a whole lot more stress than what we thought it would be. With all that in mind though, work is a good thing.

I think so often it can be tempting to think what we do doesn’t have value. What I mean by that is many people work in a large office or a cubicle, and rarely get a “thank you” for the hours they put in. And so many come home to shuttle kids from an appointment to a sports practice and then spend time helping a son or daughter with homework, but might rarely get a “thank you” for it. But yet, they do it day after day after day. Why is that?

Well, for one, a closer look might reveal not all is horribly bleak. Many people care about what they do and want to make a difference. And in many positions, while it can be at times unsatisfying, I think people may stay at them because they see themselves making a difference too. This was something important to Saint Paul, as he states that those who do not work should not eat, meaning that through our work we make a contribution to the community.

For another, people take up their cross, which is what the disciple must do as we heard a couple of weeks ago at Mass. In Saint John Paul II’s encyclical on human labor, he points out how we participate in the work of the Creator and the Redeemer in that we imitate God in working and resting, and that “He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform.” I think that is so evident in how so many people give of their time, even when they do not want to, because they recognize that their job is important for their company, for themselves if they are going to be a productive member of society, and for those who rely on them.

And finally, we also can’t forget how our actions speak so loudly. We might not think about it, but through our labor, we not only take up our Cross, but serve as a proclaimer of the Gospel. As I reflect on my parents growing up, I was born when they were in their early 20s. Both worked jobs that probably wouldn’t have been their first choices, but

they kept a roof over my head and food on our family's table. And being we lived in an existing home in North Minneapolis and both had elderly parents, that meant they were doing things always around the house to improve it, and helping out my grandparents by doing such things for them as driving them to the store in the winter, or mowing their lawn for them. On top of this there was all of the home maintenance and brining up two kids. Their work never ended. Through how they have lived and continue to live their lives, they've shown me how important work is in that it has a place, has dignity, and really makes a difference.

So, for all of you who ever sat in a traffic jam, for all of you who have gotten out of bed when you would have rather slept in, for all of you who took your son or daughter to softball practice after your long day, and for all of you who spent time getting comfortable with fractions rather than the TV at the end of a long day: thank you!

And, also a big thank you to the many people here at our parish family who work so hard behind the scenes. Because of them, the facility looks great and is maintained; we have a balanced budget; we have parish events; we have a vibrant faith formation program and opportunities for youth; we have an excellent school, and a parish that is so alive. What a joy and blessing it is to work with such an amazing staff.

Yes, work is a good thing. But when those inevitable moments come where it seems like you never get any respect or thanks, or when you think back to when you were 10 and wanted to be the starting quarterback for the Vikings of movie star only to be sitting on the freeway on a cold January morning, never fall for the lie that what you do doesn't matter, because it does. No matter what it is you do in life, everyone who has ever worked makes a real difference in the world by helping society to improve and helping others who rely on them, but so too by being a true evangelist and a beacon to others of faith in action. Your work matters - and my hope too is that you don't let it consume your life, but also make time for rest, family and friends. Hopefully we remember that and strive to live the balanced life, and take Labor Day and celebrate the fact that through our work, we transform the world and also help show one another what the faith is all about.

God bless,
Fr. Paul