



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

September 1, 2019

Christ at the Head of the Table

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In a commencement address at Northwestern University, comedian and talk-show host Stephen Colbert recalled what he learned from his experience as a member of an improvisation group. “One of the things I was taught early on,” he said, “is that you are not the most important person in the scene.” He said the best improvisation comes from a team that listens and responds to each other to “serve a common idea.” When someone

demands attention or tries to force a skit in a certain direction, the comedy falls apart. I never forgot his advice. It is appropriate in families, in workplaces, and among friends. And I confess I have had to apply it to myself on more than a few occasions.

Jesus’ parable on humility, using a wedding reception as his setting, is a caution against presuming that we know best or that we—our goals and talents—are most important. He is not advocating false modesty or a refusal to use the gifts God gives us. Rather, Jesus asks that we start from a place of humility and service. He wants us to allow others to say what they need and how we can help before we presume to know the solution or how the situation should unfold.

First and foremost, the figurative head of the table belongs to Christ, and it’s up to us to obediently go where he tells us. He will give us our place. It’s worthy to note that at the table of the Lord, every place has the same significance and everyone is a welcome guest. The important one is Christ. After that, we are all equals, regardless of who we think we are. +

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A Word from Pope Francis

One must not exaggerate the mystique of work. The person is not only work; there are other human needs that we must cultivate and consider, such as family, friends, and rest. It is important, therefore, to remember that any work must be at the service of the person, not the person in the service of work.

—Letter to conference on human development, November 23, 2017



Sunday Readings

Sirach 3:17–18, 20, 28–29

My son, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.

Hebrews 12:18–19, 22–24a

No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering.

Luke 14:1, 7–14

[Jesus said,] “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Rather than practicing one-upmanship, when I am with a braggart am I able to remain humble?
- Do I allow my actions, such as kindness and generosity, to speak louder than words?

The Spirituality of Work

By Kathy Coffey

Monday is the day of the week many people dread. After the weekend, a collective sigh wafts across the world: “Ugh. Back to work.” The drill can be tedious, the routine exhausting, and the boss stupid. Work may appear to be a grubby girl cleaning the sooty fireplace, but beneath the ragged camouflage hides the beautiful Cinderella. How can we learn to see work as a productive outlet, a means of support, and God’s gift?

The problem may come from compartmentalizing our prayer and our work. Is Sunday the tidy hour given to God, separate from anything else we do? Or does our faith permeate every minute of every day, especially endless hours spent working?

To resolve this dilemma, let’s look at our model, Jesus. He was surrounded by people who worked: fishermen, farmers, tax collectors, shepherds, and soldiers. He drew his images from a woman baking, a farmer pruning vines. He worked hard, too.

Jesus’ first followers continued along that path. Paul the tentmaker wrote: “You know well that these very hands have served my needs and my companions. In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak” (Acts 20:34–35). The Benedictine



abbeys of the Middle Ages were founded on two cornerstones: *ora et labora*, prayer and work. The Franciscan missions in California were beehives of activity: crops were grown, grain milled, wine made, furniture carved, cloth woven, paintings and sculptures created. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux fell asleep during

formal prayer, but she found God in routine, daily occupations—her “little way.”

These examples show that we’ve always respected work, considering it essential to a full life. A subtle pecking order undercuts this respect, distinguishing “loftier” work (done with clean hands) from “lower” work (grubbier). But healthy folks relax those distinctions. An “earthy” pastor drew protests when he pitched in to wash dishes after a potluck dinner. He pleaded with those who tried to take over, “Please let me finish. It’s the only tangible thing I’ve accomplished all day.”

A local physician delights in her garden. Mucking in the dirt relieves her stress. Like many whose work is primarily mental, she finds that physical labor helps her feel whole.

More dangerous than the hierarchy of work is the suggestion that somehow we taint our spirituality with drudgery. The teaching of Jesus about the lilies of

the field (Matthew 6:28–29) prompts criticism of overwork and consumerism.

We need to understand that the paycheck fills legitimate needs, providing education, shelter, and medical care for ourselves and our children. Furthermore, work provides creativity, a social dimension, and a step beyond the self.

Anyone who has ever questioned work’s importance to the human spirit should watch preschoolers at play. Many pretend to be firefighters, parents, doctors, or truck drivers, modeling mysterious adult responsibilities. In Montessori schools, children wash dishes that aren’t dirty for the sensuous joy of the task: clean scent, warm water, popping bubbles.

We may have lost that first fascination with work through numbing repetition. But many recapture it through hobbies: working on a toy railroad or a pottery wheel seems more fun if it’s not for a paycheck.

Our outlook thus colors our work. Seeing the potential to encounter God at every turn of the page or pour of the coffeepot enlivens repetitive processes. And, if we see a job done well as an opportunity to glorify God, this attitude will add meaning to our work. +

PRAYER

Lord, you came to be the humble Servant of God to all people. Give me a humble heart so I may be a selfless, compassionate servant to the poor and vulnerable.

—From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 2–7

Monday, Weekday:
1 Thes 4:13–18 / Lk 4:16–30

Tuesday, St. Gregory the Great,
1 Thes 5:1–6, 9–11 / Lk 4:31–37

Wednesday, Weekday:
Col 1:1–8 / Lk 4:38–44

Thursday, Weekday:
Col 1:9–14 / Lk 5:1–11

Friday, Weekday:
Col 1:15–20 / Lk 5:33–39

Saturday, Weekday:
Col 1:21–23 / Lk 6:1–5

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