

God in the Workplace

[Excerpts from “Caution: God at Work,” Robert Marczynski, published in *NACPA Issues*, February 2008; Robert Marczynski, is Director of Administration/Stewardship at St. Ann Catholic Church in Bartlett, TN.]

Help - Wanted

“The Lord God therefore banished him from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he had been taken.” Gen 3:23

An explosion of books, articles and websites on the subject of spirituality suggest that our quest to “find” God and to develop a continuing relationship with Him, must start in the one place and activity, we probably overlook the most. It is the one place we spend the bulk of our day and lives – work. Like it or not, work is what we do. In many ways, our work defines us. Typically, when we meet a stranger we ask, “What type of work do you do?” When asked to introduce ourselves, we usually give our name



and occupation. Whether or not we are paid, or how we define what we do, most of us will work at least 45 years of our lives – that is more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of our anticipated life span. Working an eight-hour day means we will work 2080 hours a year or a whopping 93,600 hours over a lifetime. Even if we factor in vacations and time off, our modern age, with its cellular phones and internet connections, finds many of us “checking in,” even while we

loungue on the beach or hike to our mountain retreats. Given how much of our lives are dedicated to work it would it only make sense that our search for God, for meaning, for spirituality must begin in the workplace. Yet, we continue to wrestle with the idea that we can have a genuine spiritual experience, let alone a relationship with God, in our work places. Work is the debt we pay for the original sin of Adam and Eve. It is the routine drudgery we must face everyday because of their insubordination. Weekends and vacations provide our only respites. The closest we may ever get to God during the week work is at the end of the week, when we offer this prayer of thanksgiving: “TGIF (Thank God It’s Friday)!”



Authors, saints, clergy and even Christ himself, tell us that despite what we may think, work is one of the easiest places, if not the best place, to develop our relationship with God and to grow spiritually. Here are a few examples. Saint Jose Escriva tells us that God is waiting for us at work:

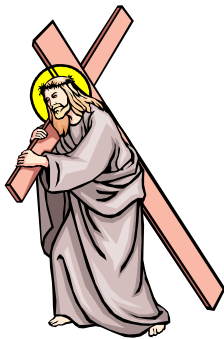
. . . work should be a means and an occasion for a close relationship with our Lord, which is the most important thing in our life. He waits for us everyday, in the laboratory, in the operating room, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in the immense panorama of work. . . . (Escriva, p.114)

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Blessed John Paul II emphasized that our work is a part of the divine creative process:

“The Son of God became man and worked with human hands. So we know, not only by reason alone but through revelation, that through their work people share in the Creator’s work. We continue in it and, in a sense, perfect it by our own work, by our toil, by daily effort to wrest a livelihood from the earth, or from the sea, or by applying energy to the many different processes of production.” (Talk in Pusan, South Korea, May 1984)

In her book, *Having a Mary Heart In a Martha World*, Joanna Weaver shares the story of Brother Lawrence, a 17th century Carmelite Brother in France. In his small book, *The Practice of the Presence of Christ*, Brother Lawrence recounts how his time cooking and cleaning in the monastery kitchen was a time of prayer, no different from the time he spent in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Weaver exclaims that this should be our goal as well:



“What a goal! To be so in tune with the presence of God that washing dishes becomes an act of worship. That the moments of our lives, no matter how mundane, become aflame with the divine.” (Weaver, p.86)

...Finally, lest we forget, we have the model of Christ himself, who spent the majority of His life, not in ministry, but as a worker in Joseph’s carpenter shop.

It’s A God Thing

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” Prov 16:3

With discipline and time, we may find, as St. Benedict claimed, and as Brother Lawrence discovered, that our very work becomes prayer. We can do all of the things these authors and speakers suggest, but unless our acts are conscious, deliberate, and prayerful, we risk losing sight of the spiritual nature of our work and the ultimate purpose – making ourselves present to God and building the kingdom.

"When we commit our work to the Lord--when we acknowledge Him as the real boss to whom we ultimately report--our perspective on what we're doing, and why we're doing it changes dramatically, as does our potential for success," writes Michael A. Zigarelli, in *“Management By Proverbs. (Zigarelli, p.40.)* To paraphrase scripture, “it’s not I who work, but God who works through me.”

“I am too busy during the day.” “I get so wrapped up that I forget.” “I can’t do anything spiritual in the open, my company does not allow it.”

These are some of the excuses we use to rationalize our lack of spiritual discipline at work. Overcoming these excuses and rationalizations may mean that we have to make an appointment with God in the same way we make appointments with clients. It may require us to put God on our on-line calendar and set it to remind us that it is time for a “God break.” It may mean that we add God on our daily “to do” list. We could transform our sticky notes into holy cards! We can make the restroom or break room into our private chapel. Nolan and Pierce both refer to the practice of St. Ignatius of Loyola known as conscience examination (not to be confused with the examination of conscience where we recall our sins and



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failings). Conscience examination means taking a few minutes each day, throughout the day to “check in with ourselves and God.” It is taking time to acknowledge our successes and failures and to plan for the tasks that lie ahead. Nolan, in an appendix to his book cites Fr. Martin J. O’Malley, S.J., who offers a formula for conducting a conscious examination during the workday. We begin by acknowledging God’s presence in our work and praying for insight and openness; then, we consider how God has been present and active in all things and people we have encountered; next, we petition for what we need to do our job; next, we reflect on our plans and assignments for the rest of the day and on how God wants us to proceed; finally, we conclude with a prayer. (Nolan, p.134)

If this still seems like too much to tackle on your own, try letting God come to you through the internet: visit www.companyofprayer.com and submit your email address to join their “morning briefing.” Early each morning, you will receive, via email, a brief prayer and quote for the day. You may also consider a free subscription to “Daily Retreat” by visiting <http://lists.gonzaga.edu/mailman/listinfo/daily-retreat-1>. You will receive an email each day with excerpts from scripture, information on the saint of the day and a few words of meditation. Bookmark www.sacredspace.ie and visit it daily. The Sacred Space web site allows you to sit at your computer and be guided through a 10-minute session that starts with relaxing your body and mind and culminating in a reflection on a scripture passage chosen especially for the day.



The point of all this is that at some time during our day, perhaps in the brief time we are walking to the break room for a cup of coffee, or to the restroom, or as we enter our office; we consciously recognize and acknowledge the presence of God in our workplace. Even Jesus took time to pray. In a talk given to business leaders on practicing spirituality at work, Memphis Criminal Law Judge John Colton related that there were four steps leading to his bench and each day as he made his way up these stairs he prayed to himself, “Thy – will – be - done.”

In similar manner, Blessed John Paul II inscribed the letters “A-M-D-G” at the top of each page of his letters, writings, and manuscripts. These letters make up the Latin phrase “Ad Majoram Dei Gloriam” which means “all for the greater glory of God.” This simple phrase, adopted by Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits as their motto, served John Paul, and can serve us, as a simple prayer and reminder throughout the day that our work is a spiritual endeavor.

A.M.D.G.

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