

HOW A FRANCISCAN APPROACHES WORK AND PRAYER

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For St. Francis, work served to both avoid a great temptation and foster a great good. St. Francis, in the Fifth Chapter of his First Order Rule of 1223, wrote that

Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working, should work faithfully and devoutly in such a way that with idleness, the enemy of the soul, excluded, they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, to which everything else must give service.

The temptation that work helped avoid was idleness. Francis understood idleness as a great danger and threat to the soul. “I want my brothers to toil and exert themselves, lest if they give way to idleness, they stray into forbidden paths with heart or tongue.” Also, “All brothers should endeavor to keep hard at good occupation, because it is written: ‘Always be doing some good work, so that the Devil may find you busy’ (St. Jerome, Ep. 49) Thus servants of God ought always keep at prayer or some other good occupation.”

Work can help foster our life of prayer and centeredness in God but only if done with the proper disposition. As David McKenna points out in *Love Your Work!*, “Daily labor has a way of engaging the mind and spirit so thoroughly that we can become obsessed with our tasks. “ According to St. Francis, work that is done both faithfully and devoutly can avoid the pitfall of obsessiveness and can nourish a prayerful disposition. Fr. Arcadius Smolinski in “The Spirit of Prayer in Work” [*The Cord (1958) 338-49*] elaborates on the meaning of working faithfully and devotedly:

What does it mean to work **faithfully**? St. Bonaventure explains what working faithfully means. It is to perform the work with due consideration for self and for neighbor (*Opera Omnia*, v. 14:581) This is accomplished by working with conscientiousness which implies knowledge of the object of the work before us.

What does it mean to work **devoutly**? To work devoutly means to take God into consideration. Accordingly, the work itself should be directed to God’s glory. St. Paul explains this through the words, “Whatever you do, work at it from the heart as for the Lord and not for men.” (Col. 3:23). To work with devotion requires “a reasoned and deliberate act of will whereby one’s intellect and will have nothing else in view but the will and glory of God; the end in mind is union with God.” (St. Albert the Great)

Work that fosters a spirit of prayer is work done faithfully and devoutly. And work done faithfully and devoutly is work that is directed in loving service to our fellow man for the glory of God. As Fr. Daniel McClellan, OFM has noted in *To Evangelize American Culture: A Franciscan Approach*:

For Francis, work for the sake of personal wealth and power was work that oppressed, sin. Work leading a person to attend to the needs of others was grace.....To use well what God has given is to use it for the sake of others since “to each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

(1 Cor. 12:7)

Work can fan the flames of the spirit of prayer but it is from a life of prayer that good and Godly work proceeds. Fr. Smolinski further quotes a Dom Jean Chautard on the relation between the active and the contemplative life:

- Good works (as in the Apostolate) should be nothing but an overflow from the inner life
- Active works must begin and end in the interior life, and, in it, find their means.
- The Active and the Interior lives are completely interdependent

Fr. Smolinski attributes to a Fr. Matheo a saying that beautifully sums up this reflection:

“The apostle is a chalice full to the brim with the life of Jesus, and his overflow pours itself out upon souls.”

Dialogue Starter

1. How does your prayer life influence your work life?_
2. How does your work life effect your prayer life?