

WORK AS SHARING IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE ACTIVITY

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*Let them esteem work both as a gift
and a sharing in the creation, redemption and service of the human community. (Art.16)*

Through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, redemption was won. Did you ever stop to consider the extent of Christ's redemptive activity? Who or what was redeemed? On first thought, we might say, "Well, us, of course - humanity - He came to save our souls." This is a correct but incomplete answer. We can begin to grasp a fuller vision of the redemptive plan by beginning with the beautiful quote from the Gospel of John: "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son." (John 3:16) Although we are the most important part of that world that Jesus came to redeem we are not all of it. In St. Paul's letter to the Romans we read that "there was this hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay, and share the glorious freedom of the children of God." (Romans 8:20-21)

In the previous sentence from this chapter of Romans, St. Paul alludes to the role that we may play in the freeing of creation from its "slavery to decay." Romans 8:19 reads: "All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal his sons." Why would all of creation wait so eagerly if God's sons were not to have a role in its liberation? And, indeed, many recent ecclesial documents confirm this. In the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* we learn that "God's plan is in Christ to take the whole world up again and make of it a new creation, in an initial way here on earth, in full realization at the end of time." This document of the Second Vatican Council goes on to say:

The work of Christ's redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring men the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal.

[Editor's note - the temporal is the created world as opposed to the eternal, heavenly order]

Laypersons have a special mission to fulfill with regard to this broader understanding of activity that is redemptive:

Laity ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order.... That men, working in harmony, should renew the temporal order and make it increasingly more perfect: such is God's design for the world. *(Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity)*

Our work, then, can be redemptive as it helps to bring our broken world more deeply into accord with God's plan - fixing what is broken; bringing what does work to a greater degree of perfection. This involves working in the power of the Spirit to free

all of creation from its bondage - individuals, social structures and systems, and the natural world as well.

Redemptive work restores right relationships. It liberates someone or something. Fr. Daniel McLellan, OFM, in *To Evangelize American Culture: A Franciscan Approach*, reminds us of how powerful the redemptive aspect of work is in the Franciscan tradition:

Redemption is the restoration of freedom, and Francis worked for and with those who were unfree because of their own or someone else's sin.... Testifying that work is redemptive, that is, proclaiming that flesh and blood can redeem flesh and blood is the source and summit of the missionary spirit...that vital energy of Franciscan work.

Dialogue Starters

1. What aspect of your work is redemptive, i.e., work that helps heal, restore, improve the world - bringing an increase in freedom, however slight?
2. What are your thoughts concerning the breadth of Christ's redemptive activity - the restoration of all creation?