

***In the Workshops of Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaria
Escriva: A 21st Century Catholic Theology and Spirituality of
Work in an Era of Epochal Artificial Intelligence Change and
Industrial Revolution***

Institute for Human Ecology at The Catholic University of America

**Bishop John Barres, STD, JCL
Diocese of Rockville Centre**

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I. Introduction

I am very grateful to the Institute for Human Ecology at The Catholic University of America for the invitation to speak to you this afternoon.

My theme is *In the Workshops of Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaria Escriva: A 21st Century Catholic Philosophy, Theology and Spirituality of Work in an Era of Epochal Artificial Intelligence Change and Industrial Revolution*.

You may remember Pope Francis announcing a Year of Saint Joseph on December 8, 2020, the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX proclaiming Saint Joseph, the universal patron of the Catholic Church.

During that Year of Saint Joseph, Pope Francis gave us the gift of his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* and I, as the Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, issued two pastoral letters on Saint Joseph: *Go to Joseph*¹ and *Celebrating Saint Joseph the Worker on Labor Day: Holiness and Mission in the Changing World of Work*².

Patris Corde brings Saint Joseph to life and proclaims his influence and intercession in the events of everyday life. *Go to Joseph* synthesizes the impact of Saint Joseph in Church and world history, as well as the teachings of popes and great saints through the centuries. Those teachings use the life and intercession of Saint Joseph to speak to real world events, crises and challenges.

¹ My gratitude to Father John McCartney for his research and writing in regard to this Pastoral Letter.

² My gratitude to Monsignor Roger Landry and Father Lachlan Cameron for their research and writing in regard to this Pastoral Letter.

Just as the March 19th Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mary, represents an opportunity to reflect on holiness and mission in marriages and in families, so too does the May 1st Memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker give us the annual opportunity to pray and reflect on the sanctification of daily work in a world of work that has radically changed since Pope Pius XII instituted this Memorial in 1955.

This presentation draws extensively on *Patris Corde* and my two pastoral letters but it also is the fruit of reflecting even further these past five years after their publication.

It also draws on the sanctification of work in the secular world teaching of Saint Josemaria Escriva (1902-1975), the founder of Opus Dei, and his devotion to Saint Joseph and his workshop.

He writes: “We look toward heaven, although the earth, which has come forth from God’s hands, is beautiful and we love it. We are not worldly, but we have to love the world, to love being in it. Nor do we separate contemplation from action: we contemplate because we work, and we work because we contemplate. Our interior life infuses new strength into our task: it makes it more perfect, more noble, more worthy, more lovable. It doesn’t distance us from our temporal occupations, but rather leads us to live them better.”³

Saint Josemaria emphasized that unity of life is essential for Christians, a unity of life that integrates faith, contemplation, work, family, social life and the call to be salt and light in the secular world into a single reality before God. Unity of life is an invitation to live our Catholic faith with coherence without disconnecting it from the concrete realities of the world and without disconnecting it from God and the transcendent and invisible truths and realities in the Nicene Creed that guide our worship of the Holy Trinity.⁴

My focus today is on a Catholic Theology and Spirituality of Work in the context of the Second Vatican Council’s 1965 *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, Pope Saint John Paul II’s 1981 Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, his 1988 Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici* and the teaching of other Holy Fathers, including Pope Leo XIV.

Let’s be clear from the beginning that the primary arena of the Apostolate of the Laity and their baptismal call to holiness and mission is in the secular world, in secular networks and in the temporal order.

³ As quoted in Manuel Belda, “Contemplatives in the Midst of the World,” in *Romana: Bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei* (Rome, July-December 1998, No. 27, English Edition), 336-337.

⁴ Cf. Kenio Angelo Dantas Freitas Estrela, “Unity of Life according to Saint Josemaria Escriva: A Proposal for the Secularized World, with Saint Joseph as a Model,” in *Annales Theologici* 27.1 (2025), 51-66.

The laity are “salt, light and leaven” because of “their deep involvement and full participation of the lay faithful in the affairs of the earth, the world and the human community.”⁵

Lay people are the Light of Christ and the Light of the mission of the Catholic Church in these secular networks and circumstances.

Vatican II teaching from *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* is summarized and focused in the 1983 Code of Canon Law in Canon 225-2 which reads: “They (the laity) have also, according to the condition of each, the special obligation to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, particularly in conducting secular business and exercising secular functions, they are to give witness to Christ.”

Pope Saint Paul VI expresses this eloquently in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975): “(The laity’s) own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the kingdom of God.” (70)

The laity enrich the missionary life of parishes by bringing this lay secular evangelizing perspective into parish life as parish life in turn strengthens them, their marriages, their family lives and their daily engagement in passionately loving the world.

The way a Catholic works evangelizes the working world.

II. Saint Joseph the Worker and the Catholic Theology and Spirituality of Work in History

The Catholic Church’s revolutionary theology and spirituality of work cannot be separated from her Biblical Theology, her Dogmatic Theology, her Sacramental Theology, her Moral Theology, her Spiritual Theology and her Catholic Social Justice and Gospel of Life teachings. They are an integral whole.

⁵ See Pope Saint John Paul II’s 1988 Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici* 15.

The Church's teaching is revolutionary because it reaches every dimension anthropologically, supernaturally and relationally of the human person – the soul, the body, the heart and mind, the imagination, and our ultimate destiny.

No other theology, philosophy or theory of work does that. They all fall short and ultimately, have caused much damage throughout history.

Indeed, when examined, many philosophies of work are best seen as expressions of the culture of death.

For instance, the tragic and horrific history of slavery in the United States reflects warped philosophies and ideas of the human person and work.

In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Ebenezer Scrooge voices a philosophy and theory of work when two men approach him for a donation to the poor on Christmas Eve.

As they describe the trials of the poor in an effort to persuade Scrooge to be generous, Scrooge asks: "Are there no prisons...are there no workhouses?"

His final dismissive punchline to the persistent men is an echo of the utilitarian philosopher Robert Malthus (1766-1834): "If they (the poor) would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

A philosophy of work grounded in Malthusian Utilitarianism has its contemporary expressions in the Culture of Death reasoning of the New York State Reproductive Health Act which permits abortion till the moment of birth and even infanticide as well as the New York State Assisted Suicide Bill – referred to euphemistically as "the Medical Aid in Dying Bill" -- signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul last Friday, February 6th while Archbishop Ronald Hicks was being installed as the new Archbishop of New York in Saint Patrick's Cathedral.

The 19th century Industrial Revolution, with its flawed philosophy of work underpinnings, resulted in violations of human dignity such as life-threatening and unsafe work conditions, terrible child labor situations and unjust wages. These injustices had to be addressed and countered by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

Consumerism is an expression of a self-destructive philosophy and theory of work. Pope Francis and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who contemplated frenetic Long Island North Shore consumerism in his 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*⁶, agree that a consumerism that drives

⁶ See Father Brandon O'Brien's 2025 Diocese of Rockville Centre Pastoral Reflection, "The Carnival by the Sea: A Catholic Reflection on F. Scott Fitzgerald, Long Island, and the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of *The Great Gatsby*," with Foreword by Bishop John O. Barres at drvc.org.

our theories of work always distorts the theories and the practice. The underlying premise that our self-worth and human dignity are defined by our net-worth results in tragedy and self-destruction in all its variety of expressions.

Nazism expressed a view of work that destroyed souls and societies and found the fulfillment of its demonic premises in concentration camps.

Communism's philosophy of work while claiming to be radical and revolutionary makes many promises about promoting human dignity but ends up attacking and ultimately destroying human dignity.

History, as always, is instructive.

Venerable Pope Pius XII instituted the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker very strategically in 1955. He chose May 1st as the date for the new feast to be a sign of contradiction to the European Labor Day or May Day. In communist countries and communist parties in Western Europe, May Day parades and celebrations glorified Marxist ideology and communism. Pope Pius XII lifted up Saint Joseph the Worker as a model for workers and in a missionary spirit to proclaim the Catholic truth and vision of work and labor.⁷

The contemporary workaholic is living out a philosophy and theory of work that makes work a false god, a golden idol – an idol that erodes and destroys marriages, families and faith lives.

So, our reflection on Saint Joseph the Worker and Saint Josemaria Escriva the Worker is not just a pious fantasy or afterthought.

In his article entitled “Unity of Life according to Saint Josemaria Escriva: A Proposal for the Secularized World, with Saint Joseph as a Model,” Kenio Estrella writes: “The contemporary world is marked by an increasing fragmentation of human experience. The extreme specialization of knowledge, the accelerated pace of modern life and secularization have contributed to a growing disconnection between the different spheres of existence. Professional life, family life, and spiritual life often appear as separate realms, making it difficult to integrate faith into daily living. In response to this reality, the concept of life unity, as proposed by Saint Josemaria Escriva and exemplified in the figure of Saint Joseph, offers a concrete answer to the modern identity crisis by promoting a balanced

⁷ Cf. Father Raymond J. de Souza, “What Have the Popes Said About St. Joseph,” *National Catholic Register*, March 14, 2021, B2.

integration of faith and daily realities. Secularism has led to the progressive marginalization of the transcendent dimension of social and professional life.”⁸

Our Catholic evangelizing theology and spirituality of work is about proclaiming the Catholic Splendor of Truth about Human Work which leads us to holiness on earth in and through our work and ultimately to Eternal Life.

Holy and virtuous work is by its nature missionary.

It is a Light of Christ and a Beacon of the Church’s mission to the world.

It is about proclaiming a Culture of Life in Work and defeating a Culture of Death in Work.

III. Our Catholic Theology and Spirituality of Work in an Era of Epochal Artificial Intelligence Change: *Antiqua et Nova* (2025) and Beyond

What a gift it has been to walk these past few months with our new Holy Father, to learn from his teaching, and witness his example.

We realized just days after the conclave and the puffs of white smoke why Cardinal Robert Prevost chose the name Pope Leo XIV.

As we know in Church history, the previous Pope Leo, Pope Leo XIII, championed human dignity and the rights of workers in the 19th Century Industrial Revolution.

Pope Leo XIV understands that the 21st century has its own Industrial Revolution – the Industrial Revolution of Artificial Intelligence.

Pope Leo XIV is determined to champion human dignity and the truths of Catholic moral and social justice teaching as they apply to the proper and just ethical development of Artificial Intelligence.

We pray in union with Pope Leo XIV for this intention this afternoon. The stakes are high and the battle in this technological ethical arena between the Prince of Peace and the Prince of Darkness is non-stop and apocalyptic.

On the January 28, 2026 Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the great Dominican Angelic Doctor of the Church, we remembered the one-year anniversary of the Vatican’s *Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*.

⁸ Kenio Angelo Dantas Freitas Estrela, “Unity of Life according to Saint Josemaria Escriva: A Proposal for the Secularized World, with Saint Joseph as a Model,” in *Annales Theologici* 27.1 (2025), 63.

Pope Leo XIV has been eloquent on the Catholic Church's voice and witness in supporting the proper ethical development and deployment of Artificial Intelligence. *Antiqua et Nova* is a powerful example of that voice and that witness. We look forward to Pope Leo XIV's ongoing teaching in this critical area.

I encourage you to review and pray *Antiqua et Nova*. It is an excellent and balanced overview of both the possibilities of AI for Catholic evangelization and the common good of global society, but also presents the ethical challenges and anthropological dangers that will need to be navigated carefully in the next years and beyond.

Though I have no expertise in Artificial Intelligence and AI is not the focus of my presentation this afternoon, the AI question does inevitably flow through the workshops of Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaria, our Catholic philosophy, theology and spirituality of work and the Biblical, Dogmatic, Sacramental, Moral and Spiritual teaching of the Catholic Church.

I would refer you especially to the section of *Antiqua and Nova* entitled *AI, the Economy, and Labor* and especially paragraphs 66 through 70 of that section which specifically address the dignity of human work in the context of the ever-expanding reach of AI.

I will now read those sections:

66. Another area where AI is already having a profound impact is the world of work. As in many other fields, AI is driving fundamental transformations across many professions, with a range of effects. On the one hand, it has the potential to enhance expertise and productivity, create new jobs, enable workers to focus on more innovative tasks, and open new horizons for creativity and innovation.

67. However, while AI promises to boost productivity by taking over mundane tasks, it frequently forces workers to adapt to the speed and demands of machines rather than machines being designed to support those who work. As a result, contrary to the advertised benefits of AI, current approaches to the technology can paradoxically *deskill* workers, subject them to automated surveillance, and relegate them to rigid and repetitive tasks. The need to keep up with the pace of technology can erode workers' sense of agency and stifle the innovative abilities they are expected to bring to their work.[\[125\]](#)

68. AI is currently eliminating the need for some jobs that were once performed by humans. If AI is used to replace human workers rather than complement them, there is a "substantial risk of disproportionate benefit for the few at the price of the impoverishment of many."[\[126\]](#) Additionally, as AI becomes more powerful, there

is an associated risk that human labor may lose its value in the economic realm. This is the logical consequence of the technocratic paradigm: a world of humanity enslaved to efficiency, where, ultimately, the cost of humanity must be cut. Yet, human lives are intrinsically valuable, independent of their economic output. Nevertheless, the “current model,” Pope Francis explains, “does not appear to favor an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak, or the less talented to find opportunities in life.”^[127] In light of this, “we cannot allow a tool as powerful and indispensable as Artificial Intelligence to reinforce such a paradigm, but rather, we must make Artificial Intelligence a bulwark against its expansion.” ^[128]

69. It is important to remember that “the order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around.”^[129] Human work must not only be at the service of profit but at “the service of the whole human person [...] taking into account the person’s material needs and the requirements of his or her intellectual, moral, spiritual, and religious life.”^[130] In this context, the Church recognizes that work is “not only a means of earning one’s daily bread” but is also “an essential dimension of social life” and “a means [...] of personal growth, the building of healthy relationships, self-expression and the exchange of gifts. Work gives us a sense of shared responsibility for the development of the world, and ultimately, for our life as a people.”^[131]

70. Since work is a “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment,” “the goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replaces human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity”^[132]—rather, it should promote human labor. Seen in this light, AI should assist, not replace, human judgment. Similarly, it must never degrade creativity or reduce workers to mere “cogs in a machine.” Therefore, “respect for the dignity of laborers and the importance of employment for the economic well-being of individuals, families, and societies, for job security and just wages, ought to be a high priority for the international community as these forms of technology penetrate more deeply into our workplaces.”^[133]

The liberating and objective truths of our Catholic Philosophy, Theology and Spirituality of Work and Human Labor and our Catholic Anthropology and Moral teaching are essential and critical at this moment of “epochal” Artificial Intelligence change.

IV. The Holy Family and Daily Work: Saint Joseph the Worker, Our Lady the Worker and Christ the Worker

Now we return to some of our fundamental Catholic biblical and theological teaching on work which guide every dimension of our approach to work including the proper anthropological and ethical development of Artificial Intelligence.

How do these biblical and theological teachings play out in our daily lives? The example of Saint Joseph, the Worker, helps to focus us on these issues. And part of that requires us to understand that Saint Joseph was not only a worker but he was also the mentor of Christ, the worker. Christ learned how to be a carpenter at the side, and through the guidance, of Saint Joseph. Christ was Saint Joseph's apprentice as He learned his trade. Christ's understanding of work reflected Saint Joseph's patient guidance in the craft of carpentry.

Thus, we celebrate that Saint Joseph the Worker mentored Christ the Worker. Every time we mentor someone in holy and virtuous work, every time we are mentored by someone in holy and virtuous work, together we echo, and are following in the footsteps of this fundamental relationship between Saint Joseph the Worker and Christ the Worker. As mentors, we should constantly ask for the guidance of Saint Joseph.

Saint Josemaria Escriva⁹, whose charism emphasizes the sanctification of daily work in every context, describes the relationship in this way: "Joseph loved Jesus as a father loves his son and showed his love by giving him the best he had. Joseph, caring for the child as he had been commanded, made Jesus, a craftsman, transmitting his own professional skill to him. So the neighbors of Nazareth will call Jesus both *faber* and *fabri filius*: the craftsman and the son of the craftsman (see Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55).

Jesus worked in Joseph's workshop and by Joseph's side. What must Joseph have been, how grace must have worked through him, that he should be able to fulfill this task of the human upbringing of the Son of God! For Jesus must have resembled Joseph: in his way of working, in the features of his character, in his way of speaking. Jesus' realism, his eye for detail, the way he sat at table and broke bread, his preference for using everyday situations to give doctrine – all this reflects his childhood and the influence of Joseph."¹⁰

Jesus, like Joseph, lived his life in the working world. His thoughts and teachings were close to the everyday reality of people at work. He constantly proclaims the Kingdom of

⁹ For a developed spiritual theology of Saint Josemaria Escriva that includes his theology of work, I would recommend Volumes 1 and 2 (Volume 3 is still in process) of Ernst Burkhardt and Javier Lopez, *Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaria: A Study in Spiritual Theology* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2017 Volume 1 and 2020 Volume 2, translated by Javier del Castillo) and Manuel Belda (and other editors), *Holiness and the World: Studies in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva*, (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1997).

¹⁰ Saint Josemaria Escriva, March 19, 1963, homily for the Feast of Saint Joseph "In Joseph's Workshop," *Christ is Passing By*, (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1973), 119-120. It is also quoted in Donald H. Calloway, MIC, *Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2020), 169-170.

God in his parables through the lens of the worker: the shepherd, farmer, sower, cook, servant, steward, fisherman, merchant and laborer.

Some of the most memorable people in the Gospels are described not by name but by the work they do: the woman at the well drawing water who proclaims the message of Jesus; the centurion, whose extraordinary faith and immediate obedience to God's will Jesus held up as an example to all. Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John from their fishing nets and he calls Matthew, the unjust tax collector, from his accounts.¹¹

Our Lord's biblical characters teach us that we learn about God and experience God in work. The Centurion understands a radical and immediate obedience to God through his life as a soldier. Peter, James and John learn about being fishers of men by the care, ordering, mending and casting of their nets. The Samaritan woman encounters Christ in the domestic chore of drawing water. After being delivered from death, Peter's mother-in-law further expresses the unity of mission in Christ by immediately cooking a special meal. The merchant with a fine eye for the most exceptional pearl teaches us to sharpen and expand our vision for the Kingdom of God's pearl of great price. The Good Shepherd teaches parents about shepherding their children and popes, bishops, priests and deacons to shepherd the People of God.

Our Lord's references to human work in the Gospels are very much connected to marriage and family life.

Our families live these Gospel passages in powerful ways. For instance, when fathers and mothers together in sacramental communion mentor children in room order, cleaning up after themselves, and, chores involving cleaning, maintaining, repairing, ordering, raking, mowing, planting, weeding, moving, painting, vacuuming, dusting, washing or table-setting, Saint Joseph the Worker, Our Lady the Worker and Christ the Worker are mysteriously present and interceding for family unity and the human and supernatural Catholic faith formation that occurs in the family at work together.

Pope Francis once said that "Families transform the world and history." One of the primary ways families do this is precisely in and through their daily work together. This daily prayerful rhythm of work in the family is translated and expressed to the entire human family with the aspiration of universal fraternity.¹²

¹¹ Cf. Bishop Michael Saltarelli's 2001 Pastoral Letter "Holiness in the World of Work," in *Origins* (Vol. 31: No. 12), August 30, 2001, 217-220. Bishop Barres and Mr. Justin Carisio assisted Bishop Saltarelli in the research and writing of this Pastoral Letter.

¹² See Pope Francis' October 3, 2020, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*.

Then there are the jobs and extracurricular activities of high school and college students which help them to develop a responsible, mature and relational work ethic. Some examples include precision and team work in fast food and restaurant service, attentive and safe lifeguarding, the yardage analysis, green-reading and etiquette involved in caddying, the attention to detail involved in fine landscaping, and the career discernment internships during college summer breaks.

How many times has a young person developed a fine work ethic through the mentoring of a teacher, an athletic, music, fine arts, drama, science, mathematics or technology educator and coach? The ones who live in our memories, hearts and destinies are the ones who helped bring out an excellence and commitment we may not have believed we were capable of.

We can think of Saint Carlo Acutis (1991-2006), a computer whiz at a young age who spread by computer technology a love for the Eucharist and a catechetical knowledge of the Eucharistic miracles that have occurred in the history of the Church.

Someone mentored Saint Carlo in computer technology so that he could make this unique contribution as a teenager to the mission of the Church.

And Saint Carlo, continues to mentor and inspire the young people of the world today with the story of his life and how he models Catholic Evangelization through Social Media.

All of us will need to be properly mentored in the daily realities of Artificial Intelligence and often by people who are younger than we are. All of us are going to need to step up as Light of Christ Catholics in this arena.

Young people are perceptive and intuitive and can spot virtuous and fine workers who animate fine charitable and supportive workplaces and experiences. Similarly, they can spot unethical and shoddy workers who cut corners and are instruments of distrustful toxic workplaces and experiences.

Saint Joseph, the just man, the example of the just and upright man in the workplace teaches us that quality work – animated with the moral virtues of prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance and with charity and a supernatural spirit – builds up the Body of Christ. In contrast, work of poor quality that is superficial, unengaged and lacking an ethical compass diminishes the Body of Christ.

Saint Joseph the Worker intercedes for us and calls out the best in the work of young people and the work of people at every and any age.

Saint Joseph is also an important intercessor for young people making decisions about career paths and for people of all ages making high stake decisions about career management and development.

Sometimes this discernment can go off course. A desire for wealth, the overly controlling expectations of family members or distorted peer influences, the desire for prestige, influence and power can obscure and block the discernment of what gifts, talents, interests, drives and skills the Holy Spirit has given us and how best to discern and invest these gifts.

Stephen Covey (1932-2012) once said that a person can climb the ladder of “success” for decades and find at some point in middle age that the ladder has been leaning against the wrong wall the entire time.

Saint Joseph can intercede for us that the ladder we climb will be the ladder of God’s will set upon the wall of God’s Glory and the Salvation of Souls.

Our Church and our globalized society are in desperate need today of teachers, manual laborers, technology professionals in this era of artificial intelligence, doctors and health care professionals, lawyers and politicians, financiers, accountants, social workers and venture capitalists who have all radically laid down their lives for Jesus Christ and serve His people and his Church by bringing holiness into the world of work.

We go to Saint Joseph the Worker and ask him to help develop the following virtues and supernatural spirit in our daily work: maturity, reliability, responsibility, integrity, initiative, self-sacrifice, team spirit, a can-do and optimistic spirit, a spirit of justice and right judgment, humility and charity with co-workers, clients and all those we serve, a Catholic ethical compass grounded in the Ten Commandments and moral virtues of prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance, consistent cheerfulness, a humble winning spirit in face of challenges, sudden deadlines and crisis, a sense of poise and effectiveness in handling crisis with a gift for turning crisis into grace-filled opportunity, a charitable and life-giving sense of humor that cuts tension and builds unity, attention to detail, industriousness, follow through, a commitment to finishing the job well, contemplative concentration, and finally in the words of Pope Francis describing the qualities of Saint Joseph “creative courage.”¹³

When we ask the Holy Spirit to expand and deepen these work qualities, attitudes, virtues and skills, we realize that we work fundamentally for the Glory of God and the Salvation of Souls and we understand that when we work well and virtuously we naturally evangelize

¹³ Pope Francis’ December 8, 2020, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

and are a powerful Light of Christ, the Gospel and the mission of the Catholic Church in the world.

V. Saint Joseph the Worker and the Paschal Mystery Rhythm of the Death and Resurrection of Christ in Human Labor

Saint Joseph stands as a ready mentor. As a master craftsman, he knows well the art of patiently imparting his trade. He did so with Our Lord, teaching Jesus the skills of carpentry and acquainting him with the intricacies and nuances of wood.

As he mentored Jesus, so Joseph desires to mentor us. He wants to teach us his virtues. He wants to instruct us how to live our spiritual fatherhood to the full. He is ready. We must simply “go to Joseph” and receive his wisdom.

The mentorship of this great saint can guide us through our work careers and vocations as his lessons remained with Jesus throughout his life. They were present to Our Lord during his public ministry and especially present at Golgotha. Indeed, as the hammer and nails aligned Christ’s hands and feet with the wood of that hastily constructed Cross, and his Sacred Body and Blood and his human sweat flowed across the tree of life, Joseph’s lessons were being lived.

Though Saint Joseph is not mentioned in the Gospels as being present at Calvary, he was present mystically. He was present in Jesus’ carpentry-mentoring memories as His Body was configured to wood. He was present with Jesus on the Cross. Thus, as Jesus called upon God the Father from the Cross, we hear, too, a beautiful echo of God the Father on earth - Saint Joseph.

If we are mentored by his fatherhood and virtues, so, too, will Saint Joseph and his lessons be with us, especially in those challenging moments of life when we are asked to love to the end.

As we plunge into the Paschal Mystery at every Catholic Mass, we plunge into the Paschal Mystery of our daily work.

Saint Joseph also helps us with our anxieties about work. Father Gaston Courtois writes: “Confide to Joseph your worries and your pains, your distress, and your anxiety; he knows from experience what anxiety and insecurity are. But he knows the key to every problem, the solution of all difficulties. For him, surrender was an active form of the total gift of himself to my Father’s plan of love. He will even solve material difficulties to your

advantage, provided you appeal to his immense influence. Finally, when you are at the hour of your death, no one will be able to help you so well as he who died in my arms.”¹⁴

Pope Francis had the custom of taking some of the papers and documents related to his most perplexing and seemingly unsolvable problems and placing them under a statue of the sleeping Saint Joseph, confident of his strong and wise intercession in finding the right and just path and charitable solution.

VI. Conclusion: Saint Joseph the Worker, Saint Josemaria Escriva and a Catholic Theology and Spirituality of Work in the Industrial Revolution of Artificial Intelligence

Last June 27th we celebrated the Memorial of Saint Josemaria Escriva on the 50th Anniversary of his death. I would like to summarize some critical points about the Catholic theology and spirituality of work that we learn in the workshops of Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaria, points that can continue to guide us in this new era of artificial intelligence.

First, a Catholic theology and spirituality of work is grounded in our baptismal call to holiness and mission within the communion of saints.

Second, a Catholic theology and spirituality of work is an expression of the Paschal Mystery, and involves a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Third, a Catholic theology and spirituality of work is Eucharistic. At every Mass, during the preparation of the altar and gifts, we hear these words: “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.” Human hands shape and create that ordinary bread that is transformed into the Bread of Life. Human feet traditionally crushed the grapes that are transformed ultimately into the Blood of Christ. The central mystery of our Catholic life and liturgy – the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Real Presence, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – presupposes and incorporates the human work that prepares the elements that will be consecrated.¹⁵ Insofar as Christ works in me, my work is offered in, with, and through Christ on the altar of the Holy Eucharist. Indeed, all noble work performed by Christians united to Christ by sanctifying grace is presented on the paten at Holy Mass and raised up to heaven and made holy in Christ.

¹⁴ Father Gaston Courtois, *Before His Face* (Volume III), (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 54.

¹⁵ Cf. Bishop Michael Saltarelli, “Holiness in the World of Work,” 218.

Fourth, a Catholic theology and spirituality of work is grounded in the Ten Commandments and especially in our Third Commandment duty to keep the Sabbath Day holy. This commandment not only emphasizes the importance of our fidelity to Sunday Mass but is an expression of a biblically-based life-work balance of labor and leisure. Saint Joseph the Worker helps us to find that holy equilibrium that safeguards and enhances our families and our desire to work in a spirit of charity.

Fifth, a Catholic theology and spirituality of work is an expression of human and supernatural solidarity. The world of work, while constantly evolving and rapidly changing, has a human and supernatural co-responsibility and solidarity. This means that when we do our work well, it has visible and invisible ripple effects throughout the People of God and the Mystical Body of Christ.

Sixth, a Catholic theology and spirituality of work is grounded in the Gospel of Life, Catholic Social Justice teaching and Catholic teaching on integral ecology.¹⁶

Seventh, unity of life is critical to the evangelizing sanctification of daily work and the common good of society. Kenio Estrela writes: “At a time when the separation between faith and secular life remains a widespread challenge, unity of life is not just an ideal – it is essential for building a coherent and authentic society. Contemporary culture often promotes a division between personal beliefs and public life, reducing religion to the private sphere and minimizing its role in shaping values and decision-making. This fragmentation does not only affect individual faith but also leads to an identity crisis, leaving many believers uncertain about how to integrate their convictions into their daily interactions. Both Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaria offer concrete models for living faith in all dimensions of life. Their examples show that holiness is not reserved for extraordinary moments but is found in the consistency of small, everyday acts...Unity of life, therefore, is not just an abstract concept but a fundamental principle for transforming the world from within. In a society where ethics and spirituality are often sidelined, the witness of those who live with integrity becomes a guiding light that influences culture, work, and family life. Faith is not meant to remain hidden; rather, it should shape every decision, action, and relationship, making Christianity not just a belief but a lived reality.”¹⁷

Finally, a Catholic theology and spirituality of work is by its nature missionary. If grace builds on nature,¹⁸ then human work is called to be both exceptionally good at a natural

¹⁶ See Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letters *Laudato Si’* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020).

¹⁷ Kenio Angelo Dantas Freitas Estrela, “Unity of Life according to Saint Josemaria Escriva: A Proposal for the Secularized World, with Saint Joseph as a Model,” in *Annales Theologici* 27.1 (2025), 64.

¹⁸ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1,1,8 ad 2.

level and holy on a supernatural level. In every work setting throughout the world, sanctified work glorifies God and attracts people by its splendor and virtue. We witness and silently preach through the quality of our work, testifying not only to the importance of work well done but to the great work God accomplished at the beginning and is calling each of us to help bring to completion.

So, together let's pray and sacrifice for Pope Leo XIV as he discerns, confronts and witnesses to the liberating truths of our Catholic faith as they apply to the new Industrial Revolution of Artificial Intelligence and how that Revolution impacts our daily work and its sanctification.

In his January 24, 2026 Message for the 60th Word Day of Social Communications, Pope Leo XIV writes: "From the moment of creation, God wanted man and woman to be his interlocutors, and, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa [\[1\]](#) explained, he imprinted on our faces a reflection of divine love, so that we may fully live our humanity through love. Preserving human faces and voices, therefore, means preserving this mark, this indelible reflection of God's love. We are not a species composed of predefined biochemical formulas. Each of us possesses an irreplaceable and inimitable vocation, that originates from our own lived experience and becomes manifest through interaction with others.

If we fail in this task of preservation, digital technology threatens to alter radically some of the fundamental pillars of human civilization that at times are taken for granted. By simulating human voices and faces, wisdom and knowledge, consciousness and responsibility, empathy and friendship, the systems known as artificial intelligence not only interfere with information ecosystems, but also encroach upon the deepest level of communication, that of human relationships.

The challenge, therefore, is not technological, but anthropological. Safeguarding faces and voices ultimately means safeguarding ourselves. Embracing the opportunities offered by digital technology and artificial intelligence with courage, determination and discernment does not mean turning a blind eye to critical issues, complexities and risks."

Let's pray for all lay Catholics in the public secular square of artificial intelligence technology and ethics, that they may be the Salt and Light of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in service to the common good of humanity and society.

Mary, Queen of the Family and Queen of the Sanctification of Daily Work, pray for us!

Saint Joseph the Worker and Saint Josemaria the Worker, pray for us!