

Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker

The Year of St. Joseph

Homily of Bishop John Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

May 1, 2021



St. Joseph the Worker and the Year of St. Joseph

This Year of St. Joseph announced by the Holy Father on December 8, 2020 continues to be a great inspiration for the mission of the Church. The Holy Father's Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* and our own Pastoral Letter *Go*

to Joseph are in many ways companion guides to the Year.

Patris Corde brings St. Joseph to life and proclaims his influence and intercession in the events of everyday life. *Go to Joseph* synthesizes the impact of St. 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 St. Joseph to speak to real world events, crises and challenges.

Just as the March 19th **Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mary** was an opportunity to reflect on holiness and mission in marriages and in families, so too does this May 1st **Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker** give us the 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.

As a carpenter and craftsman, St. Joseph the Worker can be an intercessory craftsman of our interior life and our humble call to progress in mental prayer.

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

The Catholic Church's revolutionary theology and philosophy 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 – a theology that challenges the assumptions of the world and says that we can do better

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.

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.

The 19th century Industrial Revolution, with its flawed philosophy of work, 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).

Twenty-first century consumerism is an expression of a 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*, agree that a consumerism that drives 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.

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 this celebration of the Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker is not just a pious afterthought.

It 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 to the world.

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

The stakes are incredibly high and let's all be clear that Our Lord will be raising this topic at each of our individual judgments.

History, as always, is instructive.

Venerable Pope Pius XII instituted the feast of St. 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 strategically glorified Marxist ideology and communism. Pope Pius XII lifted up St.

Joseph the Worker as a model for workers and in a missionary sense to proclaim the Catholic truth and vision of work and labor.¹

We take this opportunity to go to St. Joseph the Worker in this Year of St. Joseph to proclaim the truth of our Catholic Theology, Philosophy and Spirituality of Work and Human Labor, a truth that sets all of humanity free.

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

How do these theological teachings play out in our daily lives? The example of Saint Joseph, the Worker, helps to focus us on those issues. And part of that requires us to understand that Saint Joseph was not only a worker but was also the mentor of Christ, the Worker.

“Is he not the carpenter’s son?” (Matthew 13:35)

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.

Yesterday, Bishop-elect William Koenig, the former rector of St. Agnes Cathedral, held a press conference at St. Peter’s Cathedral in Wilmington, Delaware to announce that our Holy Father Pope Francis has appointed him the Bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington. What a moment for the Diocese of Wilmington! What a moment for the Diocese of Rockville Centre! What a moment for St. Agnes Cathedral!

After the press conference, Bishop-elect Koenig concelebrated Mass with Bishop Francis Malooly. Close to the tabernacle in St. Peter’s Cathedral is a stained-glass window depicting St. Joseph the Worker and Carpenter mentoring Jesus in carpentry with Our Lady watching in the background. That beautiful piece of stained glass is now part of Bishop-elect Koenig’s life and ministry as a Catholic Bishop. Together, in this Year of St. Joseph, we ask the intercession of St. Joseph the Worker for Bishop-elect William Koenig.

We celebrate on this Memorial that St. Joseph the Worker mentored Christ the Worker. Every time we mentor someone in holy and virtuous work, every time we

¹ Cf. Fr. Raymond J. de Souza, “What Have the Popes Said About St. Joseph,” *National Catholic Register*, March 14, 2021, B2.

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

St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei 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.”²

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 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.³

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, Andrew, 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

² St. Josemaria Escriva, March 19, 1963 homily for the Feast of St. 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.

³ 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.

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, St. 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. This daily prayerful rhythm of work in the family is translated and expressed to the entire human family with the aspiration of universal fraternity.⁴

St. Joseph the Worker's Intercession for Youth, University Students and Young Adults at Work

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, university student⁵ or young adult developed a fine work ethic through the mentoring of a teacher, athletic, music, dramatic,

⁴ See Pope Francis' October 3, 2020 encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*.

⁵ See Bishop Barres' August 1, 2020 *Bringing Christ to Campus: Words of Advice for College Students Striving for Holiness*: "6) Sanctify your daily academic work. As you sit down for a three-hour study block of biology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, literature, art history or theatre, begin with a short prayer that offers God your academic concentration, determination and tenacity and transforms the study into prayer and a practice of the presence of God.

science, mathematics or technology coach? The mentors who live in our memories, hearts and destinies are the ones who demanded an excellence and brought out an excellence and commitment we may not have believed we were capable of.

We can think of Blessed 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 Blessed Carlo in computer technology so that he could make this unique contribution as a teenager to the mission of the Church.

And Blessed 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.

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.

St. Joseph, the just man, the example of the just and upright man in the work place 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.

St. 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.

St. 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 expectations of family members or distorted peer influences, the desire for prestige, influence and

Be a Renaissance person who is able to integrate step-by-step the history of music, art, cinema and literature as you study engineering, accounting, journalism, education, history or some other dimension of liberal arts. A Renaissance person grounded in the truths, mission and mysticism of his or her Catholic faith can cast a wider net of mission and evangelization because of a capacity to engage in a wide range of conversations with a wide range of people.”

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.

St. 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, 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.

Go to St. Joseph the Worker!

We go to Joseph on this Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker and ask him to help develop the following virtues and supernatural spirit in our daily work: maturity, reliability, responsibility, integrity, initiative, order, 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 St. Joseph “creative courage.”⁶

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. We understand that when we work well and virtuously we naturally evangelize and are a powerful Light of Christ, the Gospel and the mission of the Catholic Church in the world.

⁶ Pope Francis’ December 8, 2020 Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

Mary Queen of the Family, pray for us!

St. Joseph the Worker, pray for us!