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Working for Love

An article by Bishop Javier Echevarria that links Saint Josemaria's message on the sanctification of work with Pope Francis' recent encyclical.

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Saint Josemaria's 40th Anniversary

The new encyclical of the Holy Father Francis is closely tied to the opening pages of Sacred Scripture. God created the human being as man and woman and placed them in the garden of Eden *to till it and keep it*

(*Gen* 2:15). And he brought all the animals to the man to see how he would name them (cf. *Gen* 2:19). This was an act of love on God's part, an expression of his confidence in each human being, to whom he entrusted the task of developing the potentialities that he himself had placed in creatures.

Each of us is a guardian and caretaker of creation. As the Pope reminds us, God placed man and woman in the garden not only to preserve it, but also to make it fruitful by tilling it, by their work. "Developing the created world in a prudent way," Francis says, "is the best way of caring for it, as this means that we ourselves become the instrument used by God to bring out the potential which he himself inscribed in things" (*Laudato si'*, 124).

When men and women strive to welcome the Creator's plan, any

noble human work can become an instrument for the progress of the world and the strengthening of human dignity.

The key is found in working as well as possible, with the desire to serve others, out of love for God and neighbor. Certainly there are other reasons why we work: to support ourselves and our family, to generously assist those in need, to attain human fulfillment.... But the Pope's words remind us that the goal is even higher: to collaborate in a certain sense with God in the redemption of mankind.

This year mark's the 40th anniversary of the death of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, that holy priest and founder of Opus Dei who proclaimed to the entire world the Gospel value of work done out of love. I am a witness to how Saint Josemaría strove to live what he

preached about work in his own life, right to the end of his earthly journey.

“Mankind's great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral,” he wrote in a book called *Christ is Passing By*. That is why work “should not be limited to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed towards love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises.”

Work, depending on its aim, can either destroy or strengthen human dignity, care for or disfigure nature, provide or omit the service we owe to our neighbor.

The importance of work for a humanly dignified life is deeply sensed by a person who is unemployed and experiences the anguish of not having an income. Therefore those who are out of work should hold a central place in the prayer and concern of every Christian. As the Pope said, helping the poor or the unemployed by giving money “must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs.” The broader objective “should always be to allow them a dignified life through work” (*Laudato si'*, 128). The encyclical also reminds us that “to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society” (*Ibid.*).

Benedict XVI defined the Christian as “a heart that sees.” In work, economic effectiveness will certainly be one factor, but never the only one. Christians put their heart into their

work because of Christ's example, and they strive to turn their work into service to others and praise for the Creator. Only work that is seen as service to our fellow men and women, and that is done out of love for God, can open up horizons for the terrestrial and eternal happiness of the people of our day and age.

Javier Echevarría

Prelate of Opus Dei

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