

Introduction



Notes Toward a Doctrine of Work

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical on work, *Laborem Exercens*, notes that, of all of God's creatures, man alone has the capacity to do work, and that in this he imitates his Creator who worked six days in creating the world, resting on the seventh. And Jesus spoke of his Father as "working still" (*Jn 5:17*). Work therefore has inherent dignity and man, insofar as he is a worker, imitates the creativity of God and finds his own dignity and fulfillment in work.

But work is also, in man's fallen state, "toil," and to that extent a "curse" to which he has been condemned by sin (*Gen 3:19*). But even here, work has no less value for man. Pope John Paul II says that this is so because, in God's Providence, work may also be a cross, a form of sacrifice that can be salvific in its effects. Thus, just as work in its glorious sense is a participation in the creativity of God as Creator, work as "toil" and suffering is able to participate in the salvific work of the Cross.

The Pope also reminds us of the Church's perennial teaching that man must never be treated as though existing for the sake of work, but to the contrary, work must always be for man's sake and benefit. This order is disturbed only at grave price to man's created dignity.



"Elements for a Spirituality of Work"

(Excerpts from the Papal Encyclical Laborem Exercens of John Paul II)

The Church sees it as her duty to speak out on work from the viewpoint of its human value... She sees it as her particular duty to form a spirituality of work which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God... (24.2).



The word of God's Revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that ability, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation... (25.2).



The *Book of Genesis* is in a sense the first "gospel of work." For it shows what the dignity of work consists of: it teaches that man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristics of likeness to God. Man ought to imitate God both in working and also in resting, since God himself wished to present his own creative activity under the form of work and rest... (25.3).



Man's work too requires a rest every "seventh day" but also cannot consist in the mere exercise of human strength in external action: it must leave room for man to prepare himself, by becoming more and more what in the Will of God he ought to be, for the "rest" that the Lord reserves for his servants and friends (*cf Mt 25:21*) ... (25.3).



Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate, as the [Second Vatican] Council teaches, even "the most ordinary everyday activities... [The faithful] can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan" ... (25.3).



[As] we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*... "Therefore, by their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of God, let [the faithful] work vigorously so that by human labor, technical skill, and civil culture created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word" ... (25.6).

"Christ, the man of work"

Jesus not only proclaimed but first and foremost fulfilled by his deeds the "gospel," the word of Eternal Wisdom that had been entrusted to him. Therefore this was also "the gospel of work," because *he who proclaimed it was himself a man of work*, a craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth... (26.1).



If we do not find in his words a special command to work—but rather on one occasion a prohibition against too much anxiety about work and life—at the same time the eloquence of the life of Christ is unequivocal: he belongs to the "working world," he has appreciation and respect for human work... (26.1).



It can indeed be said that *he looks with love upon human work* and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father. Is it not he who says, "My Father is the vinedresser," and in various ways puts *into his teaching* the fundamental truth about work which is already expressed in the whole tradition of the Old Testament, beginning with the Book of Genesis?... (26.1).



In his parables on the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ constantly refers to human work: that of the shepherd, the farmer, the doctor, the sower, the householder, the servant, the steward, the fisherman, the merchant, the laborer. He also speaks of the various forms of women's work. He

compares the apostolate to the manual work of harvesters, or fishermen. He refers to the work of scholars too... (26.2).



This teaching of Christ on work, based on the example of his life during his years in Nazareth, finds a particularly lively echo in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Paul boasts of working at his trade (he was probably a tentmaker), and thanks to that work he was able even as an Apostle to earn his own bread. "With toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you"... [2 *Thess* 3:8].

Hence his instructions, in the form of *exhortation* and *command*, on the subject of work: "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living," he writes to the Thessalonians. In fact, noting that some "are living in idleness...not doing any work," the Apostle does not hesitate to say in the same context: "If anyone will not work, let him not eat." In another passage *he encourages* his readers: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward"... (26.3).



Commentary and Notes

So one must work.¹ The obligation is commanded by our Creator, amply fulfilled in the working life of his Son, and pressed home to us in bold language by the Apostle, quoted above. No mortal is exempt from this obligation to work, to meet his or her responsibilities, and also, let us quickly add, to become the person he or she is meant to be, by developing and using talents and means God has given for these very purposes.

Still, the question remains as to how one is to go about one's work. How does one work in a proper way? Are there right ways and wrong ways? Certainly there are many ways one can go about a task, but, as we read in the chapters of this book, not all of them are good. St. Paul admonishes, "Whatever your task, work heartily²..." and then adds, "as serving God, not men."

"As serving God, not men." And least of all, not *self*. In taking on a task, one can be so self-absorbed that the thing that really matters in the effort is the benefits or perhaps the costs accruing to the self. That in fact would seem to describe many of us much of the time, but common as this is, and innocent as it may seem, self-interest as a primary motivation is defective and misguided. Jesus told Luisa Piccarreta that work done "not for him but for self-gratification, however good it may appear, is not pleasing to him." And Our Lord says that He will not bless work done in that spirit; it will fall short of what it would otherwise be when blessed.³

Or the work itself might come to mean so much that the worker for one reason or another becomes enslaved to it, either through internal psychological compulsion, as with workaholics,

¹ St. Vincent de Paul, IV-22; Theophan, IV-86

² *Thess* 26:3; Albert Einstein, IV-84

³ Luisa Piccarreta, II-27, III-36

or through external circumstances that reduce the worker to mere means to material ends, as with those enslaved against their will. In either case, internally or externally, the worker is valued only for the sake of the work he performs, as work's slave and not as its master as Christian anthropology would have it.⁴

So how are we to work then? If motives of self-gratification are wrong, and over-attachment to the work itself is disordered, what is the right way? The answers offered in the selections of this book are clear and unmistakable – what makes work right and acceptable is work done, not for self, not for the sake of the work, but for the sake of others, first and foremost of whom must be God who created us, endowed us with gifts, and whose Providence supplies us with means and occasions to serve his purposes. We are to love and serve Him in this life so that we may enjoy Him forever in the next. We are meant to work for God and his good pleasure, and to do so with all our heart because of his goodness to us in the first place.

But still the question remains, does it not, as to how one is to go about this? How does one serve God well? One can have the best intentions, and intentions are certainly fundamental, but what of execution? Does the perfection that Our Lord calls us to not also include the way we go about performing our work?

To try to answer this, let us consider four individual workers each of whom has been given some job to do, and let us examine how each goes about accomplishing the work at hand. The nature of the task is unimportant; it could be anything, physical or mental. What matters is how the work is undertaken, how it is performed. As we shall try to show, four people can work in very different ways.

In what follows, we employ the masculine convention when referring to the four individuals. We do this entirely for the sake of simplicity, but of course the gender of the individuals is not the issue – what is being said would of course apply to both men and women equally.

First Individual

The first individual is the rather self-absorbed person we have already touched upon whose deepest motivation in any work is self-satisfaction. The key word here is self. The first thing this person does when confronted with a task is to wrap his ego around it and never let anything or anyone else in. Rather than standing back to gain perspective or perhaps ask some advice, he plunges into the work willy-nilly. It may seem that he studies the matter at hand, and of course to some extent he does, and he may appear to listen to others, but he sees and hears very little outside of his own mind.⁵ In the end what is most important to him, consciously or otherwise, is that the work reflect him and his ideas, even if this be at the cost of a better idea from someone else.⁶

Least of all does it occur to him to submit his mind to the matter at hand and let the matter itself suggest the way to proceed. A good worker of course would do just that, but our first friend doesn't work that way. For him the motivating undertow is always himself and what the work will say about him personally, which is why, when he looks at the work in progress, he is quick to see what

⁴ *Imitation of Christ*, IV-21

⁵ II-28; III-20

⁶ Mary of Agreda, I-7 (last para.); Luisa Piccarreta, I-28 (last para.); IV-47

is right and self-affirming, slow to see what is wrong and in need of correction. And this is why, too, he is the sort of person who thinks his work is finished when others see it as still half-done.

It is not that this individual lacks good intentions, or talent, but because he is shut in on himself, he works with preconceived ideas, and being preconceived, more often than not they are ill-conceived for the task at hand. All of this because he has next-to-no misgivings about his ideas and impulses and next-to-no idea what the situation ideally calls for.⁷ This may be due to an immature, high opinion of his own abilities, or possibly his blatant self-confidence masks a secret fear of failure. Either case—immaturity or anxiety—could account for his impulsiveness and why it never occurs to him to challenge his own work. If we have any doubt about this, consider how this poor man reacts to criticism. Much like the rest of us, very probably.

Given all that we have seen about this first individual, is it any wonder he is not peaceful? Even his physical movements are brusque, lacking in gracefulness. If the work at hand entailed some physical object and that object could speak, we should not be surprised to hear it complain of manhandling. No wonder his work is often complicated, never quite on the mark and almost always leaving something to be desired.⁸ This individual means well, tries hard, and is not a bad person. Truth be told, he is to be found almost everywhere you look, alas with too few exceptions. Most probably, we need only look in the mirror to find some semblance of his type.⁹

Second Individual

This second person, in approaching the task, is open to suggestions and criticism because, more than anything, he wants to get it right, even at the expense of his own ego if that has to be. Workers of this type stand out precisely because their work quality stands out, and it does so just because they do *not* impose ill-conceived ideas on the work. So too our second friend here. Before acting he pauses, considers all angles, listens to the matter, and to others. His tools are all laid out in advance, and he is in no hurry to begin.¹⁰

This person has a healthy misgiving about first impulses¹¹ regarding how to proceed, and when he gets an idea, he is inclined to challenge it before embracing it. He is like the sculptor who, before touching the marble, examines it to see what the stone might be telling him. What he winds up doing arises from a dialogue with the stone, wherein he modifies and adjusts his ideas, perhaps even to the extent of doing something quite different from his original intention, just because of what the stone has had to say to him.

He is like Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Crito*, who abruptly stops speaking in the middle of a sentence because an inner voice has told him what he was about to say was false. Or like the great pianist Rubinstein, whose fingers, it is said, hesitated an infinitesimal instant before striking the key, as if to defer to a second, more perfect impulse in place of his first.¹²

He is like the scientist who, in attempting to find answers to a quandary, tests and re-tests his ideas, tossing them out one after the other until he gets something that begins to hold water. He

⁷ I-11; *Imitation of Christ*, IV-43; Mary of Agreda, V-3

⁸ *Psalms* 127:1-2; Theophan, I-14; Luisa Piccarreta, IV-78

⁹ Luisa Piccarreta, III-100

¹⁰ Thomas M. Fahy, I-18 (Blessed Dina Bélanger)

¹¹ Luisa Piccarreta, IV-105

¹² IV-93

is a good scientist precisely in the measure that what is important is not *his* ideas but the truth to be found out in the matter at hand.¹³

Or like that plumber who comes to your house to fix this hard-to-trace leak. He studies the problem, takes his time checking the pipeline above and below the wet spot, goes out to the truck more than once to get the right tool. He works quietly, no fuss, no mess, no noisy tools tossed to the floor, and before you know it the job is done and done well.

Or like the surgeon whose patients recover from the operation twice as fast as normal, with zero complications and hardly any scar.

This second individual takes pride in his abilities and achievements, to be sure. But he has learned how to work in a better way than our first friend. He has learned to have misgivings about first impulses because first impulses are often off the mark. He values truth in the work above his own ego, and for that reason becomes his own best critic, constantly checking his work to see where it might have gone wrong. And for that reason too he is open to criticism and help from others. If perchance he makes a mistake, he does not try to cover it up but is grateful to have found it and fixes it as best he can. And if he can't, he knows that mistakes teach valuable lessons.

It is not that he is humble so much as instinctively wise, wise enough to realize that only in this way can results be good and true. He may be proud but he has the virtue of objectivity¹⁴, and because of that, goes further and achieves more. In sum, his work has a rightness about it, an excellence that our first individual is simply incapable of. As for his physical movements, they tend to be measured as well. It is not likely our second worker would be given to brusque, impulsive gestures, no more than to impulsive turns of the mind.¹⁵ It might not be quite right to say that this second individual is peaceful, but he is calm and collected as he goes about his work.

But for all its apparent excellence, his work still lacks perfection the way God measures perfection. That is because this second individual works without so much as a thought of God.¹⁶ As our Lord says to Luisa Piccarreta:

*If you had been more humble and closer to Me you would not have done that work so poorly. But because you thought you could begin, continue and end the work without Me, you succeeded...but not according to my wish. Therefore ask my assistance at the start of everything you undertake. Always have Me present to work with you and it will be completed with perfection.*¹⁷

Third Individual

Our third individual approaches the work more as Our Lord would have it done, which is to say, doing it for Him and with his help.¹⁸ As such, he stands on the far side of a "bottomless

¹³ II-8 (Einstein)

¹⁴ IV-54, 2nd para.

¹⁵ Brother Lawrence, IV-82

¹⁶ Theophan, I-14, II-19; St. Catherine of Genoa, III-78; Luisa Piccarreta, IV-7, IV-77; Sister Mary of the Holy Trinity, IV-98; St. John of the Cross, IV-99

¹⁷ Luisa Piccarreta, I-28; IV-72; St. Augustine, III-97; St. Catherine of Genoa, IV-40

¹⁸ Jean-Paul de Caussade, IV-29; Theophan, IV-51; Jean-Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O., IV-75; Brother Lawrence, V-5

abyss”¹⁹ that separates him from the first two, in the company of those who do what they do for God, not just for themselves, and who, as they go about their work, listen to Him and his holy agents for guidance²⁰, seeking to do as He tells them.²¹ Now, it is true that the first two may also call themselves believers, but they do not work for God, do not think to invite God into their workaday actions, as when, for example, they hammer a nail, or bake a cake, or design a bridge, and as such they work as practicing atheists.

Not so our third friend. He is a true, functioning Christian because, before he begins any task, he prays. He takes to heart Christ’s saying that without Him we can do nothing. He takes to heart Christ’s promise that those who ask shall receive. He is like G. K. Chesterton, who said he prays before doing anything at all.²² At his best he is like the monks for whom work itself is a prayer (*laborare est orare*).²³

Though our third friend is a lay person, he resembles the good priest Raniero Cantalamessa who says he asks God, “by the simple means of prayer...whether it is his will that I make that journey, do that job, pay that visit, buy that object, and then I will act or not.”²⁴ Or he is like one wise enough to heed the Orthodox monk, Theophan:

*When you...busy yourself with secular affairs, do it in such a way that you remember the Lord at the same time. Act and speak always with the same awareness that the Lord is near and directs everything according to his pleasure. Therefore, if there is something that requires your attention, prepare yourself beforehand so that you will not be withdrawn from the Lord in the course of attending to it, but will remain in his presence all the while.*²⁵

What he does is not yet perfect; it still lacks the high perfection Christ calls us to, but what matters is that he has begun to let God into the details of his life and work. Yes, he has weaknesses, possibly some of them serious, and knows he must work out his salvation with “fear and trembling,” as St. Paul admonishes. But he also takes to heart Paul’s reassurance that “it is God who, for his own generous purposes, gives you the intention and the power to act” (*Phil 2:12-16a*).

Yes, his life is far from perfect. His journey to God is taking him through a minefield of temptations, mistaken notions, distractions, unwise attachments, shortcomings, rebellions of pride, and so on. So yes, *fear and trembling*, for these are all things God will contend with in him.²⁶ But it is above all a journey into joy and peace as our good friend experiences, over and over again, that he is not alone, that God is with him in all the moments of his life and work, good and bad, big and small. *Joy and peace* because these very shortcomings and weaknesses show up as opportunities for mercy, when mercy is trusted and truth is squarely faced.²⁷ As our third friend advances along this path of personal truths and divine truths leading both to self-

¹⁹ St. Faustina, III-56

²⁰ Luisa Piccarreta, IV-16; Our Lady to Maria of Agreda, IV-92, V-3

²¹ IV-101; Theophan, VI-25

²² G. K. Chesterton, VI-11

²³ Tony Hendra, IV-56

²⁴ Cantalamessa, IV-61

²⁵ Theophan, IV-67; Brother Lawrence, IV-82

²⁶ Jean-Pierre de Caussade, I-4, I-5; Luisa Piccarreta, II-29, III-61; Consuela, V-18; Anthony Bloom, VI-6

²⁷ St. Claude de la Columbière, II-43; Jean-Pierre de Caussade, IV-30; Luisa Piccarreta, V-22; *2 Cor 12: 7-10*

knowledge²⁸ and the knowledge of God, he learns to say with Paul, “*when I am weak I am strong.*” And the cry, “*O happy fault*” takes on ever-deeper meaning.

As this person approaches the assigned task, then, he turns to the One who has promised to help, the One to whom the first two individuals will not turn. He works carefully, confidently, preserving recollection, seeking to do the work as diligently as possible, watchful never to let the work mean too much too him.²⁹ And because of this faith, and the experiences borne of it, he has come to work peacefully, an inner peace already felt by those around him. And the fruit of this way of working becomes evident in the uncomplicated integrity of what he produces – nothing faked, nothing forced, nothing hurried, everything right and as it should be.³⁰

To the world his work might seem ordinary. If a pianist, for example, he is unlikely to sound like Rubinstein; if a scientist, not likely to make great discoveries. Such distinctions are possible, of course, but hardly inherent to this third manner of working. Yet cumulatively, his work will exhibit a quality of rightness that thoughtful people invariably come to appreciate.³¹ But what most distinguishes his work, what is most important about it, is the simple, hidden fact that God, being invited into the work, blesses it and accepts it for his purposes.³² That the world remains clueless about this matters not a whit.

As for his physical movements, these too are apt to be different. Romano Guardini amusingly once suggested you should be able to tell a Christian by the way he climbs a tree. Someday perhaps our third friend may come to make movements like the rabbi Chagall tells us about, a holy teacher to whom disciples would travel from great distances not to hear words of wisdom but to witness how he tied his shoelace. Shortcomings remain, surely, but God can write straight with these crooked lines when our failings are brought to him. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, “It is the Lord who accomplishes all that we have done.”³³

Fourth Individual

The fourth person we describe differs from the others in the most profound and fundamental way (and, of course, the “he” we employ in describing this person could just as easily, if not more likely, be a woman). Let us try to explain this person by way of contrast with the others. The first individual, we saw, places self at center stage and operates that way, producing work that gets by but, like an unseasoned, overweening actor, invariably leaves something to be desired, like less of himself. The second individual also sees himself as principal actor but he restrains upstaging impulses of self for the sake of objectivity and truth and a kind of fidelity to the task, and consequently performs his work in a superior way and with superior results. The third person, through a prayer life stirred by what he has learned about God and about himself,³⁴ has moved self aside to let God on stage, with the result that, whatever others may think of it, his work is pleasing to God and he is restful in that knowledge.

²⁸ Luisa Piccarreta, II-29; II-40 (St. Catherine of Siena)

²⁹ Theophan, II-19

³⁰ I-19 (Anne Sullivan); Hugh Owen, IV-41 (Dina Bélanger); Dina Bélanger, IV-59

³¹ III-34

³² Mary of the Holy Trinity, I-31; St. Faustina, IV-71

³³ *Isaiah* 26:12; Jean-Pierre de Caussade, IV-29 (2nd para.), IV-68

³⁴ III-91 (St. Catherine of Siena) (last 2 paras.)

The difference with our fourth friend may not be noticeable at first. It's not a matter of his going right when the others are going left, or up when the others are going down. Sometimes, yes, but that is not the essence. The essential thing is that this person no longer has a self in the usual sense; it is gone, been given away; it has died and been absorbed back into its Maker who gives it new, divine life.³⁵ Now, in place of self, God becomes the principal actor, with our friend never more than supporting cast, and even here it is God who animates him. In the words of The Little Flower:

*I believe quite simply that it is Jesus Himself, hidden deep in my poor little heart, who works within me in a mysterious manner and inspires all my daily actions.*³⁶

So too our fourth friend. This we admit is not easy to grasp. After all, our fourth friend looks little different from anyone else. The fact that when he works, God is working, when he does something, God is doing it in him, does not mean these acts are extraordinary, no more than it did in the first thirty years of Our Divine Lord's life as He worked alongside his foster father or helped his mother with household chores. Nothing in Him attracted special notice in the neighborhood. "Is this not the carpenter," they said of Him, "the son of Mary?"³⁷ But the Father saw the way his Son handled his tools; his unhurried, simple acts had the perfection God wanted for them. And the Father took pleasure in these acts: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."³⁸

Our fourth friend works this way as well, in the measure that God grants it to him. He understands that Christ is the vine, he but a branch. He knows the branch is meant to bear fruit and knows where branch fruit comes from. He takes Jesus' words in *John 15:5* quite literally. He understands in the depths of his heart, in the very marrow of his bones, that without Christ he can do nothing of worth in God's eyes. It does not mean that he will do great things, only that what he does will please his Lord and accomplish the Lord's purposes, because, whatever the task, whatever the purpose, he looks to Jesus to do it in him, as He said He would.³⁹

Listen to what Our Lord had to say about this to Luisa Piccarreta:

My dearest daughter, do you see in what close union of life I am with you? Thus, I want you closely united with Me. But do not believe that you should do this only when you pray or when you suffer. No, but rather always and forever. If you move, if you breathe, if you work, if you eat, if you sleep – all of this you must do as if you were doing it in My humanity, as if all of your work came out of Me.

In this manner nothing can be yours. Rather, all must be in you only as a shell, and opening this shell of your work there has to be found the fruit of the Divine Work... Hence, by doing everything with this intention of receiving life from Me, even the indifferent and small actions acquire the merits of my Humanity.



This volume is filled with reflections and revelations about what goes on in the heart and mind of souls like our fourth worker, describing their relationship to God, and God's

³⁵ Lorenzo Sales, II-20 (2nd para.); Luisa Piccarreta, III-53, IV-34

³⁶ Ste. Thérèse of Lisieux, IV-49

³⁷ *Mk* 6:3

³⁸ *Mt* 3:17

³⁹ Sister Maria Consolata, II-23; III-15; St. Catherine of Genoa, IV-40

relationship to them. To a secular reader these writings must seem incomprehensible, and believers themselves are apt to think them pious exaggerations, if not wholly unbelievable. Yet is this not precisely what we pray for when we utter the words, *"Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done"*?

Consider the selections in this volume from the pen of Luisa Piccarreta, the Italian lay mystic (1865-1947) to whom Jesus revealed teachings of a most remarkable kind. (Her cause for canonization is currently being pursued in Rome.) A serious student and disciple of Luisa has this to say about her writings:

*The doctrine that human acts achieve their true and highest dignity only when they are performed in us by Jesus, or, we might say, by the Divine Will of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is not new... What is new in the recent private revelations [to Luisa] is the understanding that it is possible for souls of good will to participate fully in the divine-human acts of Jesus and Mary and to allow the Divine Will to reign in all of their thoughts, words, and actions during their lives on earth."*⁴⁰

We want to ask, practically speaking, how does this work? Our Lord explains:

*You must keep one eye on Me and the other on what you are doing... Do not look to see if the task is painful or difficult. You shall close your eyes to all that, and you shall open them to Me, knowing that I am in you to oversee your work.*⁴¹

This is how our fourth friend, the perfect worker, works. He works as Our Savior worked, of whom it is said, "even when He was working He made of his work a perfect prayer."⁴² As we know from the Gospel, the Son of God did nothing but what he saw the Father doing, said nothing but what he heard his Father say (*Jn 8:28-30*). No wonder it was said of Him, *"He does all things well"* (*Mk 7:37*).

No wonder then that things seem always to go well with this perfect worker, to fall into place just as and when they should. He seems always to have the right touch, know the right word, the right thing to do in a given circumstance. The touches are often small and unnoticeable, always humble in nature, like Jesus' in the carpenter's shop, but cumulatively, the good effect is unmistakable to those with eyes to see. In the end, this person's work has a perfection, an orderliness that sets it apart, a "radiance," (to use Aristotle's description of beautiful things) "beyond the proportioned parts of the matter."

And how can it be otherwise? A perfect worker lets God enter into his work and would not think to work without Him, any more than he can find air to breathe without Him. He has come to believe in the divine order where, in all things and all doings, God is primary and we with our efforts are never more than cooperating causes. This does not mean that secondary causes are not important, or are not free⁴³, only that the proper order must be preserved. Our friend works within that order and his work reflects it.

Listen to what Our Lord tells Luisa Piccarreta about this:

⁴⁰ Hugh Owen, III-62

⁴¹ Luisa Piccarreta, IV-79

⁴² Our Lady to Consuelo, VI-31

⁴³ I-20 (3rd para.), I-22, III-42

My daughter, all the Divine Science is contained in upright works. This is because uprightness contains all the beauty and good that one can find – order, usefulness, beauty and skill... Where [Divine Science] is lacking in the creature, the creature won't do anything other than dry up amid his disorder.⁴⁴

And about effectiveness of this *divine order*, listen to Irenaeus:

Where there is order, there is also harmony; where there is harmony there is also correct timing; where there is correct timing there is also advantage.⁴⁵

A perfect worker has come to this felicitous state because, as said, he has died to self and been raised to new life in Christ. This new life is given gratuitously, as a pure gift of grace, but only after a lengthy, not to say easy journey into self-knowledge. As Jesus tells Luisa:

The greatest gift that I can grant a soul is to make it know itself. The knowledge of oneself and the knowledge of God go hand in hand. In so far as you shall know yourself, so shall you know God. The soul that has known itself, seeing that of itself it can work no good, transforms the shadow of itself into God; and it comes to pass that it does all its operations in God. It happens then, that the soul is in God and walks beside Him, without looking, without investigating, without speaking. In a word, it is, as it were, dead; for knowing in depth its nothingness, it does not dare to do anything of itself but blindly follows the influence of the operations of the Word.⁴⁶

And again:

So that I can pour my graces into your heart, it is necessary for you to convince yourself that by yourself you are nothing and are capable of nothing... Souls that consider my gifts and graces – given to them by my Love – to have been acquired by themselves, are committing many thefts. Remember that I am generous and pour torrents of graces on souls that know themselves – souls that do not usurp anything for themselves and understand that everything is accomplished by means of my grace...

I cannot enter into hearts that stink with pride – souls so puffed up with themselves that there is no place in their hearts for Me... You must be like an infant in swaddling bands who, unable to move by himself, even to walk or move a hand, must rely on its mother for everything. In that way, I want you to remain near Me – like an infant – to always ask for my help and assistance, acknowledging your nothingness and expecting everything from Me.⁴⁷

Is it any wonder that the perfect worker, in accomplishing his (or her) given task, exudes peace and tranquility, even if, judging by the world's standards, he may even fail.⁴⁸ Is it any wonder that his movements are graceful beyond nature. In the words of an old saying:

*You can tell a saint
By the way he sits
And the way he stands
By the way he picks up things
And holds them in his hands*

⁴⁴ Luisa Piccarreta, III-64

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, II-32

⁴⁶ Luisa Piccarreta, II-29

⁴⁷ Luisa Piccarreta, III-68

⁴⁸ St. Faustina, IV-85

Or, even more, like Our Lady, of whom de Montfort said (in *True Devotion*) that “she gave more glory to God by the smallest of her actions, say, twirling her distaff, or making a stitch, than did...all the saints together by all their most heroic deeds.”

Now, it is true, if someone were to suggest to us that God is the main actor, the principal mover in his or her actions—especially someone the likes of us—this would make us not a little uncomfortable. It would have to strike us as presumptuous in the extreme; and to the secular mind this is bordering on madness. It’s hardly something we would ever claim for ourselves. Yet isn’t this what St. Paul claimed when he wrote: “*It is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me*”?⁴⁹ And isn’t this the very thing that Jesus claims for us all when he said, “*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me*”? And then in the very next moment, he pronounces those breathtaking words, “*For without me you can do nothing.*”⁵⁰ We may think, *OK, sure, the saints are this way*; we are not a bit surprised to hear that The Little Flower felt the hand of God in everything she did.⁵¹ But ordinary folk are not saints, and face it, most people do what they do in their lives without a hint of these remarkable words of Jesus. We seem to get along pretty well on our own, so is it really so? Can we do nothing without Him? Perhaps the voices recorded in this book will persuade us that, truth be told, without *him* we cannot even hold this book in our hands, let alone understand its teaching. But if we open ourselves to this Divine Truth, come to understand and live by it, it is certain things will go well, for us and those around us.

Listen again to what Jesus said to Luisa Piccarreta about this:

*The Celestial Creator, when He sees the soul in his Will, takes it in his arms and, placing it on his lap, lets it operate with his own hands and, with the power of the “Fiat” with which He made all things, lets all his reflections descend upon the creature in order to give it the likeness of his operation. This is why the operation of the creature becomes light, is united to the single act of its Creator and is constituted in the Eternal Glory and continuous praise of its Creator. Therefore, be attentive, and make sure that the most important thing for you is to live in my Volition, so you will never descend from your origin, that is, from the bosom of your Creator.*⁵²

A doctrine of working in a proper way, as our fourth friend, the perfect worker has learned, is not complicated. All we have to do, whatever the task, is to heed Our Lord’s simple request: “*Let me do it!*”⁵³ Simple but not by any means easy. Doing what Our Lord is asking takes work, a lifetime of work, both on His part and ours⁵⁴. It’s called sanctification.



While you are working

⁴⁹ *Gal 2:20*; Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, I-36

⁵⁰ *Jn 15:4,5*

⁵¹ Ste. Thérèse of Lisieux, IV-36; Blessed Dina Bélanger, IV-58; Archbishop Luis Maria Martinez, IV-73

⁵² Luisa Piccarreta, III-102. *See also* III-75; III-84, IV-34

⁵³ Sister Mary Consolata, III-79

⁵⁴ III-80

And while you are working—working because I want to work—look how my fingers are in yours. And, at the same moment I work in you, to how many do my hands bring the light of this world? How many do I call and how many others do I sanctify, correct, chastise, etc. You, then, are also here with Me to create, to call, to correct, and more. And since you are not working alone, neither am I in all my works. Could I have given you a greater honor?

– *Our Lord to Luisa Piccarreta (1912)*

The purpose I have with you

The purpose I have with respect to you is not to do tremendous things... my purpose is to absorb you into my Will and to make us One alone, and to leave you a perfect model of uniformity of your will with Mine. But that is the most sublime state; it is the greatest prodigy. It is the miracle of miracles, which I intend to make of you.

If there are two objects from which one wants to make only one, it is necessary for one to give up its proper form and take on the other's; otherwise, it would never come to form one single entity. What would be your fortune if destroying yourself in order to make yourself invisible, you would be able to receive a completely divine form! Even by your being absorbed in Me, and I in you, forming one single being, you would come to retain all goods, all gifts, all graces, and you would not have to look for them elsewhere, but within yourself.

– *Our Lord to Luisa Piccarreta (1900)*



A Practical Note

We still need to ask, if Our Lord wishes to live in us, to act in us, to reproduce his humanity in us, with all the dignity that that implies, why do we not let Him? What holds us back? Is it perversity, ignorance, or is it perhaps a false understanding about what God is asking of us?

As we read this book, we hear the voices of saints, popes, mystics, theologians all telling us that when a soul allows God to act in it, things go well for that soul and that it cannot be otherwise, even when suffering is involved. But is this our experience? Despite our faith, many of us lead mildly discontented lives, unreconciled to what is, wishing for something different, something better. *And we are rarely truly peaceful.* Why is this? Why are we at sixes and sevens when Our Lord offers us a perfect life in him? It cannot be that He is offering something that is simply beyond our reach!

The following may help us with this final question. It is a private instruction from Our Lord to an anonymous soul concerning his own difficulties in this regard, but it is relevant to us all. The instruction speaks to this question of why our lives as men and women of faith may be off-kilter. It tells us there may well be something we do not understand about God, and about ourselves, and must come to understand if we are to become the persons God is calling us to be, and do the things he is calling us to do in the way that He wants—in short, if we are to become his perfect workers. We do well to give what follows a careful reading:

Right and Wrong Ways to Relate to God

THERE ARE TWO EXTREMES, each of which is bad, and which you must learn, therefore, to avoid. One is to seek your peace in Me, as you think, but without striving to conform yourself to Me. And the peace you are seeking, therefore, is not My Peace, but a sensual complacency in yourself which you would like to think is in Me. But it isn't. And that is why My Love for you cannot allow you to rest in that kind of peace – because it isn't mine.

Then, realizing that something is wrong, you swing to the opposite extreme, now trying [by your *own* efforts alone, without Me] to conform yourself to Me, in order to please Me – and by that motive your act is good, yet it is disordered and so, again, I cannot allow you to find your peace, i.e., My Peace, in it.

What We Do Wrong When Our Failings Come to Light

And here is the very heart of this lesson, that when I show you – through a severe temptation, or sometimes even permitting you to fall – how prone you are to evil, you conclude, rightly, that you are not, in the measure of your evil disposition, conformed to Me. I mean this, not merely in a general way, but in a very particular and precise sense, that you are not conformed to Me *now*. And consequently it is impossible for you to be in peace, My Peace, unless you are actually conforming yourself to Me – not in a general way, but just in the way that I want you to be conforming yourself to Me at this moment.

And here is the mistake you make – you do not understand that the very realization of your inadequacies is My Voice calling you to come to Me in order to get what you need to please Me. *And so the mistake is to seek what you need apart from Me* – and then things go from bad to worse, because then you allow yourself to be separated from Me more and more, and this in the illusion that you are pleasing Me thereby!

The Right Way to Act

Now do you see the lesson I would teach you? *That the more you recognize your lack of conformity to Me the more promptly you must run to Me and the more closely you must cling to Me, to My Heart* – not to remain as you were (that is the other extreme) but to become what I want you to be, realizing that *only as you are united with Me* can you receive the grace necessary to do what I am asking of you at this moment. And then, after this realization, as your soul is in My Peace, you will know, clearly, what you are to do by your own powers – and you will understand that each thing you are doing is pleasing Me – and then your peace will grow as you are actually conforming yourself to Me – *because your every act will be My action in you*. You must understand that My Peace which I give you is not something completed in which you can rest as in an end. No! It is My Life, your participation in My Life, which is a constant becoming.

Understanding How Our Own, Distinct Free Will Works within God's Will

You can see, too, in this, how the error comes from your incapacity to understand how the *distinct principle* – your own free will and its operation – is distinct, *not* as it is *separated* from Me, but just as it is *united* with Me. But in your ignorance you are moved to undertake your responsibility in relation to Me by separating yourself from Me, as though it would not be your

own act if you were united with Me. Whereas the truth is the very contrary—far from being your own act without Me, *it would not be any act at all*. And so, the natural consequence of your notions of freedom and responsibility is that your act becomes more and more disordered as you remove yourself more and more from the Principle of your acts, your Life. And this increasing disorder, you can see, gradually approaches the state of non-being, or nothingness.

Do you see now? Do you see how true it is that *without Me you can do nothing*? Ponder this lesson very much. It is the secret of My Peace, My Peace which I give to you.



