



# **Novena for Workers, the Unemployed and Underemployed**

BY DEACON KEITH FOURNIER





## Novena Prayer Seeking the Intercession of St Joseph the Worker

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## DAY 1

### REFLECTION

On May 1st, Communist Regimes used to parade their weapons of destruction through the streets of major cities held captive under Marxist oppression. They called the day May Day and International Workers Day. Some still do. The Marxists proclaimed that a worker's paradise could be achieved through a counterfeit ideology which promised that a new man and a new society could come about without the need for a Savior. It was during that period that the Catholic Church emphasized the Feast of Joseph the Worker. One of its goals was to expose false ideologies and proclaim that the dignity of all human work is rooted in the dignity of the worker, who is created in the Image of God.

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## DAY 2

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A Christian understanding of work views it through the lens of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. God Incarnate, Jesus the Christ, was a worker! From the carpenter's shop in Nazareth, to his public ministry, to the Cross, Jesus was always about the Father's work. When confronted by some misguided religious leaders for teaching on the Sabbath, he told them, "My Father is working still, and I am working." (John 5:17) All human work, when it is joined to the work of Jesus, is made holy and helps those engaged in it to grow in holiness. The early Christian Church Father Gregory Nazianzus expressed the implications of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in these insightful words, "Whatever was not assumed was not healed!" Because the entire human experience was assumed by Jesus, work, as a part of that human experience, has now been transformed by Christ the worker!

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## DAY 3

### REFLECTION

In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council addressed the dignity of work by pointing to the humanity of Jesus: *He who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam, He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin. (Paragraph #22)*

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## DAY 4

### REFLECTION

As a child, Jesus learned from Joseph the Worker how to work with wood. He would later climb upon a wooden cross to re-create all humanity, making it new through the culmination of His great work of redemption. All the work of Jesus Christ was joined to His Heavenly Father's work. That is the same relationship which we now have with the Father through Him. Though there is some biblical support that the toil or "sweat" of work is due to the Fall (See, Gen 3:19), human work is not a punishment for sin. Work occurred before the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Our first parents tilled the garden. That was work. Jesus was always doing the work of the One who sent Him (John 9:3-4) and we are invited to do the same in the work which is part of our daily human existence.

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## DAY 5

### REFLECTION

The worship of the early Christians became known as liturgy. The Greek word can be loosely translated work or duty. Liturgy is the work of the Church. For the early believers, the world was not a place to be avoided, but became their workshop! They understood that they were in the world, precisely to bring all men and women to the Font of Baptism and include them in the Body of Christ, the Church. Then, they too could participate in the work of Jesus which continues. The Church is now placed in creation as a seed of its very transfiguration. All things were created in Jesus Christ (see Col 1:15-20) and are being re-created as His work continues through His Body, the Church of which we are members. The unfolding of all of this is a what St. Paul calls a plan and a mystery, to bring all things together under heaven and on earth in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1: 9-10).

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### REFLECTION

For the Christian, no matter what we are doing as work, we are admonished by the Apostle Paul to "do it as unto the Lord" (see Colossians 3). That choice, that exercise of our human freedom, deciding to treat our work differently, places us in the position to receive the graces we need to both view it - and do it - differently. It enables our work to change the world both within us and around us. This way of viewing work includes all human work, not just what is sometimes viewed as the "spiritual stuff." God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, did not just do what is often called the "spiritual stuff." All human work sanctifies us - and changes the world around us.

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## DAY 7

### REFLECTION

In the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans St Paul tells them that creation "groans" for the full revelation of the sons and daughters of God. We can have a new relationship to the created order, beginning now, by choosing to live our faith. We live in the Son, through whom and for whom, all was created - and all is being re-created. When we embrace our daily work with a mind renewed by the Holy Spirit, we begin to comprehend the plan of God, including the Christian view of work. We live in an age which has lost sight of the dignity of work because we have lost sight of the dignity of the human worker. In the industrial age, men and women were often reduced to mere instruments in a society that emphasized productivity over the dignity of the human person, the worker. The technological age promised something different, but has failed to deliver on that promise. Too often, men and women are still viewed as instruments and objects rather than persons and gifts.

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### REFLECTION

In 1981 John Paul released a letter entitled "On Human Work". In the introductory paragraph, he wrote: *"(W)ork means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual... Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it, in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning, therefore he is called to work. Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus, work bears a particular mark, of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense, it constitutes its very nature."*

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## DAY 9

### REFLECTION

The Feast of St Joseph the Worker

The Catholic Church proclaims that the path to true freedom and Human flourishing is found in walking as a disciple of Jesus Christ. She affirms that there is a dignity to all human work, no matter what type of work it is, precisely, because of the dignity of the human worker engaged in it. That worker is created in the Image and Likeness of God. That dignity was always a part of the Fathers loving plan of creation. It was elevated to even greater heights through the Incarnation of Jesus, the Worker of Nazareth. On this Feast of St. Joseph, the Worker, we should reflect upon the creative and redemptive value of all human work, especially when it is joined to Jesus Christ the Worker.

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