

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 58

Jesus, a man of work 1 – Under-worked and Over-worked

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In his preaching, Jesus teaches that we should appreciate work. He himself, having “become like us in all things, devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter’s bench” (*Laborem Exercens*) in the workshop of Joseph (cf Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), to whom he was obedient (cf Lk 2:51). Jesus condemns the behaviour of the useless servant, who hides his talent in the ground (cf Mt 25:14-30) and praises the faithful and prudent servant whom the Master finds hard at work at the duties entrusted to him (cf Mt 24:46). He describes his own mission as that of working: *My Father is working still, and I am working* (Jn 5:17), and his disciples as workers in the harvest of the Lord, which is the evangelisation of humanity (cf Mt 9:37-38). For these workers, the general principle according to which *the labourer deserves his wages* (Lk 10:7) applies. They are therefore authorised to remain in the houses in which they have been welcomed, eating and drinking what is offered to them (cf Lk 10:7).

Today in Trinidad and Tobago there is the perennial complaint that young persons, particularly young men are unwilling to work. Many of them have no appreciation for work and the rewards that work can bring.

Many remain idle and the ultimate result, as we are seeing here in Trinidad and Tobago, is a spiralling crime wave, where the young men have taken up guns and resort to other illicit activities in order to earn a living.

Actually, many of these young men believe that this is a faster and easier way to make quick and larger sums of money. For many of them the concept of a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay is non-existent. Easy money to gain the world is the order of the day. Work is not seen as an opportunity for a person to find his true purpose and mission in life or to give a sense of personal accomplishment.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are many of us who are addicted to work. When one assignment is finished we can always find another one to do. Many complain that work never seems to end – but in fact the truth is many of us do not want the work to end. We forget ourselves, our family, our health, to achieve some goal or reward, whether it be more overtime pay or the feeling that we have accomplished so much.

“In his preaching, Jesus teaches man not to be enslaved by work. Before all else, he must be concerned about his soul; gaining the whole world is not the purpose of his life (cf Mk 8:36). The treasures of the earth, in fact, are consumed, while those in heaven are imperishable. It is on these latter treasures that men and women must set their hearts (cf Mt 6:19-21).

Work, then, should not be a source of anxiety (cf Mt 6:25, 31, 34). When people are worried and upset about many things, they run the risk of neglecting the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (cf Mt 6:33), which they truly need. Everything else, work included, will find its

proper place, meaning and value only if it is oriented to this one thing that is necessary and that will never be taken away (cf Lk 10:40-42).”

The anxiety related to work is something that affects many people, we want to impress our bosses, not seem lazy, and be the best that we can be, we want to ensure that everything is perfect – we are working for ourselves.

The *Compendium* reminds us that often the rewards that we seek are not lasting. Many persons have only come to appreciate this after they have been “forced” to retire, whether because of ill health or compulsory retirement age, because their lives can seem so empty when work in the traditional sense can no longer be a part of their lives.

There are others who after retiring now truly experience the joy of living. Note that this anxiety also applies to those persons who work in non-governmental organisations, Church organisations and those who work in the home caring for families.

The challenge for us, especially younger persons who are either now embarking on careers, or at the peak of their careers, is to find the appropriate balance between a desire to work and be productive, caring for family and the need to rest, recreate and to serve and please God.

Next week the discussion on work continues.