
ST. JOSEPH THE WORKER

The biblical figure Joseph of Nazareth, husband of Mary and the earthly father of Jesus, is honored today as the patron saint of workers and as an exemplar of human work and family life. Despite suffering under an empire that kept working people in poverty, Joseph carried out his trade, provided for his family and taught Jesus to do the same work. He knew hard days of toil in the heat and Sabbath days where the world went still. He heard God addressed in the words “We are the clay and you the potter; we are all the work of your hands” (Isaiah 64:7) and may have linked his own work as carpenter, spouse and parent to God’s work in creating and providing for God’s people.

Inspired by Joseph, the Catholic Church offers a rich and robust body of teaching on the human dignity of work and its importance. Whether in factories, markets, in the home or in the parish, the work humans do contributes to shaping the world, ideally to make it holy in accordance with God’s plan. As every person carries out her work, she also shapes who she herself is to become, ideally in line with God’s plan for her. Catholic teaching recognizes that work is unjust when done for inadequate wages; under dangerous or difficult conditions; under any conditions of discrimination or harassment; or when inadequate time is left for family and civic life. Work that affords the worker no opportunity for creativity, agency or satisfaction can also become “alienating,” in the phrase of Pope John Paul II. Work should be a factor that builds up the human person, not a force that destroys.



“In Joseph, faith is not separated from action. His faith had a decisive effect on his actions.”
-St. Joseph the Worker



In addition to being honored as the protector of working people, St. Joseph is the patron saint of many dioceses in the U.S. and of the Universal Church, making him an apt spiritual resource for Church workers. In their document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote “All of the baptized are called to work toward the transformation of the world. Most do this by working in the secular realm; some do this by working in the Church and focusing on the building of ecclesial communion, which has among its purposes the transformation of the world.” St. Joseph the Worker, pray for us! Strengthen our efforts to transform the world!

PRAY

Oh God, The fullness of blessing comes down from you, to you our prayers of blessing rise up. In your kindness protect your servants, who stand before you devout and faithful, bearing the tools of their trade. Grant that their hard work may contribute to the perfecting of your creation and provide a decent life for themselves and their families. Help them to strive for a better society and to praise and glorify your holy name always. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

From “Order for the Blessing of Tools and other Equipment for Work,” Book of Blessings, 1992