
18th Sunday after Pentecost 2020
2 Corinthians 9:6-11 & Luke 5:1-11

Work is something most living creatures understand. For those who are still in the work force, have you ever asked yourself whether you work to live or live to work? There is a big difference between working to live and living to work. Working to live gives you the money you need to put a roof over your head, shoes on your feet and bread on the table. That is a necessary aspect of life. There is a traditional saying that God gives the birds their food, but He doesn't throw it into their nests. Whereas, living to work gives you the satisfaction of feeling good about the work you do. Fortunate are those whose work both provides their livelihood and fulfills their lives.

Most of us work for a regular paycheque. Money provides us with a better quality of life, whatever that may mean to each of us. In such cases, work is literally "making a living." We all decide for ourselves what is the "good life." For some, it's merely staying above the poverty line. For others, it's affording anything we want. Still others, it is the freedom to fulfill their goals and dreams. The point is, we work because our work will probably give us something more in life than we would have without it.

When workers remain unemployed over the long term, they end up discouraged. They are less likely to return to the labour market because their skills may have eroded, their motivation may be gone, or employers may discriminate against them. And if they return to work, they could see effects like lower pay that linger throughout their careers.

Feelings of unworthiness cripple more lives than we know. Low self-esteem keeps people from taking the initiative for a worthy vocation until we turn our lives over to God.

In our Gospel reading, Simon Peter is a disciple to whom we all can relate. He was often impatient and easily discouraged. After worked hard all night and catching no fish, Simon Peter was ready to quit. But, when he followed Jesus' instructions, he made the catch of his life! That is when feelings of unworthiness overwhelmed him. "Leave me, Lord," he said, "For I am a sinful man."

Simon Peter and the brothers, James, and John made their living as fishermen. The fishermen's lives would change forever when Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people. Whatever the fishermen may have understood this to mean when they returned to shore, Simon, James, and John left everything and followed Jesus. Christ is the Lord of second chances.

In their experience with Jesus, the fishermen's work transformed into a vocation. For the rest of their lives, they devoted their energy to serve Jesus. The future would be full of struggles, hardships, and even persecution for these disciples. But it would be living for something so much larger than themselves that the cost of their calling would become secondary.

But work isn't always a calling. For many people, work is drudgery, something to be endured. For such people, work has no other meaning than a paycheque. In such cases, there is a sense in which work is just work and nothing else. It is we, and others, who give meaning to our work. The difference between struggle and fulfillment is usually not in work itself. For example, let's say we are digging a ditch. We are finding it boring, tiring, and pointless. Then someone explains to us we are digging a foundation for a hospital or a school. Suddenly we aren't just digging dirt; we are contributing to the world. A vocation is when one finds a purpose in one's work larger than the work itself. Then work becomes

fulfilling and can be offered as a contribution to the common good and as a holy offering to God.

But work has many faces. It may be a blessing, a good gift from God. But, like anything else, it may be tainted by human sinfulness. The same materials and labour can build a chapel or a brothel. Work may become an idolatry, where we give to our work the honour and energy that belong only to God. Work may also become a means of taking advantage of people or even abusing them. Simon Peter, James, and John represent the best of all possibilities. They found in Jesus Christ a calling to serve God with their lives and gifts. Dorothy Sayers, an English crime writer and poet, in an essay titled "Why Work?" says, "Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do." Our work should be the medium through which we offer ourselves to God.

We are all called to rise and follow Jesus, but where does he lead us? He leads us into the lives of other people. Throughout the Bible, God called individuals to special assignments, but the larger purpose was always to bless the world through them. Each of us has a calling, the incredible possibility that our lives, and our work, may become blessings from God to others. There is fishing for us to do. People all around us need to be caught by the transforming love of God in Christ, and for this very purpose, we are called and sent.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we have some choice in where to invest our efforts and use our skills. Even if we cannot choose our work, we can do our best to make it a hymn of praise to God, who created all things, and they were good. And we too, like Simon, can catch people, not by our words alone, but by how we live our lives.

Amen!