

Reflection for Friday 3rd Week of Easter 2020 St Joseph the Worker

The first image we have of God is that God is a worker. After all he created the world, the universe and everything within it. In his letter about the change effected by the Industrial Revolution Pope Leo XIII appealed to employers to treat workers and the work they do with dignity and respect. He writes in *Rarum Novarum*: *The following duties . . . concern rich men and employers: Workers are not to be treated as slaves; justice demands that the dignity of human personality be respected in them, ... gainful occupations are not a mark of shame to man, but rather of respect, as they provide him with an honourable means of supporting life. It is shameful and inhuman, however, to use men as things for gain and to put no more value on them than what they are worth in muscle and energy.* (#31) In Acts we hear about Saul's conversion and the beginning of his journey to becoming a great preacher and teacher of Christian faith. But, pause! Jesus spent three days in a tomb and emerged from the darkness of death into new life and became the light of the world. Paul once struck down in his encounter with Jesus became blind and remained in darkness for three days after which he was given sight and emerged into the new life of a believer in Christ and one of its greatest advocates. We should never discount the importance of any period of darkness, especially when it leads to new life with God that is filled with light. Despite Pope Leo's encyclical, the rights and dignity of workers took a lot, lot longer than three days before they came to fruition. However, there are still large areas of the world where this does not happen and workers are exploited, downtrodden, and abused. They need our prayers. Celebrating St Joseph, the worker, today is a reminder not only of the dignity of work but of the importance that any work has for the betterment of the whole of society. St Joseph accepted his responsibility to become the father of the family into which Jesus was born and he accepted it with love because he was loved and respected by God for his obedience – an obedience accepted out of love. The majority of us, like St Joseph, will be obedient to God's will and work quietly away in the background with little recognition. Yet, our role, like that of St Joseph, is not only crucial but essential for God's plan of salvation to be fulfilled. Like our Creator, we work to create something that is good, and, not just good, but very good.

Here's a short poem by **Madeleine L'Engle** imagining Mary speaking about Joseph, her spouse.

It was from Joseph first I learned
of love. Like me he was dismayed.
How easily he could have turned
me from his house; but, unafraid,
he put me not away from him
(O God-sent angel, pray for him).
Thus through his love was Love obeyed.

The Child's first cry came like a bell:
God's Word aloud, God's Word in deed.
The angel spoke: so it befell,
and Joseph with me in my need.
O Child whose father came from heaven,
to you another gift was given,
your earthly father chosen well.

With Joseph I was always warmed
and cherished. Even in the stable
I knew that I would not be harmed.
And, though above the angels swarmed,
man's love it was that made me able
to bear God's love, wild, formidable,
to bear God's will, through me performed.