

## Respect Those Who Labor Among You



 Christopher News Notes

*Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” —Matthew 11:28*

**FROM THE START OF HIS MINISTRY,** Jesus showed a special concern for workers. The fact that God chose a human father, who was a tradesman, to raise Jesus up in this way speaks to the respect the creator of the universe has for those who labor. Christians owe this same respect to people in all forms of employment. In addition, we need to recognize the divine in our own everyday jobs.

## Saint Joseph the Worker

St. Joseph is the only saint to bear the title “the worker,” and from what little is captured about him in Scripture, his work is central to his personality and the role he played in raising and teaching Jesus. Author Mike Aquilina writes in *Angelus News*, “The New Testament tells us, in Greek, that St. Joseph was a ‘tekton.’...[which] is Greek for ‘craftsman’ or ‘artisan.’...That meant he was a skilled laborer...It’s the name his neighbors remembered him by.”

The Jewish Torah taught that all work reflected human dignity, and that fathers had an obligation to teach their sons a trade that would be useful to earning a living. This would have certainly been a lesson in St. Joseph’s workshop. What’s more, ordinary work was believed to include a divine dignity, which could be made holy and reflect the glory of God. This thinking continued in the early Church and was countercultural to Roman and Greek societies that prized philosophy, leisure, and wealth more than hard labor. Aquilina writes, “The Church Fathers didn’t hesitate to portray Jesus working at various trades. And everyone recognized this as a radical idea.”

## Respect for the Trades

Ask any homeowner how easy it is to route a pipe to a mainline or properly wire a circuit into an electric panel, and you’ll discover a genuine respect for the people who can get jobs like this done. The building trades in recent years have been making a comeback, as more young people see the benefit in learning plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, construction, and masonry.

In Lanham, Maryland, the young men and women you’ll find in Plumbers and Gasfitters Union Local 5’s training facility have proven they need to combine intellect with elbow grease to become masters at their jobs. But they realize they might be seen as being uneducated because they didn’t go to college. “The division is partly a function of people thinking that because the work is dirty, it must be stupid,” motorcycle repairman Matthew

Trudy Harris is a hospice nurse whose work not only brings comfort and care to the dying, but it allows her to witness moments that glimpse a reality beyond what most people typically see and hear.

Writing in *Guideposts* magazine, Trudy explains how she first got into hospice care, helping her beloved father-in-law during his battle with pancreatic cancer. During his final days, his hospice nurses told Trudy that her compassionate approach would fit in perfectly with their profession. Despite some worries, Trudy pursued the idea. “I knew hospice was my calling because almost from the day I started, I met people who showed me just how thoroughly I had misunderstood death,” Trudy writes. “I came to understand the joy God has prepared for His children.”

Through her interactions with dying patients, she saw the grace that God extends people at the end of their lives. Old wounds were healed. Profound feelings of love and peace overcame the dying. Family and friends were cherished like never before. Through making people comfortable and being present with them in their last days, Trudy embraced the holiness of performing her job.

Crawford (who holds a PhD) told *CBS News*. “If people never attempted skilled manual work, they may not understand just how intellectually rich and engaging it can be.”

All jobs are worthy of respect, and those who work with their hands must first figure out complex solutions in their minds. It takes skill, imagination, and intelligence to be a good tradesperson. And what’s more, the business acumen of your average self-employed plumber or electrician would surprise many. You have to be just as skilled with marketing, accounting, personnel management, and dozens of other tasks to run a successful independent business.

Tradespeople earn money while apprenticing—and lucrative salaries once they have mastered their crafts. They are hoping that white collar America adopts a new attitude towards them. Jake Thiess, an apprentice at Local 5, said, “We do work with our hands a lot, but a lot of it’s up here [indicating his brain]...People think it’s simple to fix a toilet.[or] to weld a pipe. A guy I work with said it’s art without an audience.”

## Teacher for a Day

No matter how wealthy and famous someone is, there are still people they look up to, such as teachers! NBA star Mikal Bridges, who plays bas-

ketball for the Brooklyn Nets, got the chance to live out one of his dreams when he spent a day as a substitute teacher in Brooklyn, New York. Speaking to *CBS News*, he detailed his experience. The second graders were thrilled to see him arrive in their classroom as their unexpected instructor, a bit taller, at six foot six, than their regular teacher.

Just like any other substitute teacher, Bridges took the students to music class, lunch, and recess. He taught them math, his favorite subject. He confessed to the students, “My other dream was being a second-grade teacher. I think just helping kids has always been a big thing of mine...I loved second grade when I was young. I feel like that was one of the years I really remember...I had a great teacher named Ms. Porter, and I feel like I always loved second grade.”

One student asked Bridges why he didn’t become a teacher. His thoughtful reply gave the students who idolize sports stars a reason to pause. “Because of basketball,” Bridges replied. “But basketball doesn’t go forever. This is just the first part of my journey, so I think ‘teacher’ is going to come up next. [I’m] trying to do both.”

Seeing one of their heroes respect and value the work of teachers had a big impact on the students. It showed that fame and fortune aren’t the sole measures of a job well done—or a job worth doing.

## An Inclusive Café

Maureen Stanko of Cedars, Pennsylvania, was worried about her son, Nick, who has autism. At age 20, he would soon be aging out of the educational system, and Maureen, like many parents of children with disabilities, wondered what would be next for him.

Nick had so much to contribute, but she knew that many people would have a hard time seeing past his challenges. Speaking to *CBS News*, she remembered what her father used to say: “When you have a problem, pray like hell, and then get up off your knees and do something about it.”

Maureen approached a local philanthropist with a radical idea: a restaurant that would employ people with disabilities. That led to the opening of *So Much to Give Inclusive Café*, where individuals with disabilities work as greeters, waiters, dishwashers—the full range of jobs. What’s more, the café has become a safe place for people with autism and other challenges to go out to eat.

Lauren Opelts, who is hearing impaired, works at the café as both a hostess and sign language teacher. She said, “I have grown so much self-confidence. A lot of these employees I’ve known since the very, very beginning, and the growth I see in them, it’s just mind-blowing.”

Maureen Stanko agrees. The café has become successful, so she is looking to expand into other services to help people with disabilities contribute

through their work and creative expression. Work is one of the ways that people, despite limitations and challenges, can make the world a better place.

## Art as a Labor of Love

Stained glass artist and sculptor Sylvia Nicolas moves lightly around her New Hampshire home and barn studio, belying her 92 years. She speaks energetically about her 60 years of religious projects, including statues, stained glass windows, and mosaics for monasteries, churches, convents, and colleges.

In an article about her for *U.S. Catholic*, Rev. Jerome Day, OSB, writes, “Her Catholic faith is not worn on her sleeve, but shines through in *why* she works, what she says, and how she acts. When she talks about the figures she depicts, she sounds as if she is describing old friends. It wouldn’t surprise her much if her saints pulled up a chair to her table or workbench.”

Nicolas’ work has included Old Testament scenes and thoughtful, larger-than-life sculptures of saints. Her St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Benedict statues are gazing into the distance, pen in hand, mid-thought, as if the viewer caught them in a moment of quiet inspiration. Perfect sculptures for the colleges and universities that host her work.

Nicolas knows that her art connects with people in sacred spaces, so a prayerful approach in the creation of it is important. She remains determined to connect with the heart of people in the presence of her art—and to listen to that quiet voice waiting to help direct her labors.

As you go about your day and cross paths with people performing all different kinds of jobs, remind yourself that God sees value in their tasks and talents. Then, try to view them through that same lens. Also, remember to respect the work that you do, whatever it is. There is a holiness inherent in doing any job well.

  
“It’s better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness.”

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“Whatever your task, put yourselves into it,  
as done for the Lord.” —Colossians 3:23