

## Session 7

# Work, a Challenge for the Family

### A. Opening hymn and greeting

### B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

### C. Reading from the Word of God

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.

A river rises in Eden to water the garden; beyond there it divides and becomes four branches. The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it (Gen 2:8-10; 15).

To the man he said: "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, "Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return." (Gen 3:17-19).

### D. Biblical Catechesis

#### 1. *The Lord God planted a garden in Eden.*

The garden of Eden is a gift that comes from God's hands, a splendid place rich in water that irrigates the whole world. The first task that God entrusts to man after creating him is to work in his garden by cultivating it and taking care of it. The breath of life which God instilled into humanity enriches it with creativity and strength, genius and vigor, so that it will be able to collaborate in his work of creation.

God is not jealous of his work, but he puts it at men's disposal with no diffidence and with great generosity. He not only entrusts them with the care of every other creature, but he also gives them the gift of the spirit so that they will take an active part in his creation and shape it according to his design. The spirit is the resource which God puts into the human creature so that he will take care of the whole creation for Him and with Him.

People were not created, as some religions of the Ancient Orient maintained, to substitute the work of the gods or to be their slaves in the humblest services. Humanity was willed by God to take care of created nature by collaborating actively in God's creative work.



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### *So that he will cultivate it and take care of it.*

While in the first account of creation (Gen 1) man is expected to rule over the animals and subject the earth, in the second account (Gen 2), reference is made instead to sowing and cultivation. And while in the first account despotic dominion is not intended but the generous dominion of a sovereign who seeks his people's good with wisdom and fairness, in the second account reference is made to patience and hope while awaiting the fruits.

In the period of waiting, man is asked to have the virtue of fidelity similar to the virtue requested of those in Israel who lent religious service in the temple. Human industriousness also requires the humility of a farmer who observes the land in order to guess how to cultivate it best, as well as the modesty of a carpenter who works the wood and respects its grain.

The correct use of the earth's resources implies safeguarding creation and solidarity with the future generations. An Indian proverb teaches that "we should never think that we inherited the land from our forefathers but that we have borrowed it from our children". The task of taking care of the earth calls for respect for nature and recognizing the order willed by its Creator. In this way, human work avoids the temptation to squander the riches and disfigure the beauty of planet earth, and to make it instead, according to God's dream, the garden of coexistence and conviviality of the human family blessed by the heavenly Father.

### *By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat.*

The risk that work may become an idol also holds for the family. This happens when work has the absolute primacy over family relationships, when both spouses are blinded by economic profit and pin their happiness only on material well-being. The risk for workers in every era is to forget God by letting themselves be completely absorbed by worldly occupations with the conviction that they hold the satisfaction of every desire. A correct work equilibrium that can avoid these distortions calls for family discernment regarding domestic and professional choices. In this regard, the principle which delegates domestic work and care of the home only to women seems unfair because the whole family should be involved in this effort according to a fair distribution of duties. Regarding professional activity, on the other hand, it is surely advisable for spouses to agree to avoid long absences from the family. Unfortunately, all too often the need to provide for the family's livelihood does not leave spouses the possibility to choose wisely and harmoniously.

Neglect of religious and family life goes against the commandment to love God and neighbor, which Jesus indicated as the first and the greatest commandment (Cfr. Mk 12: 28-31). To recognize his fatherly love with all his gifts and to live in this



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horizon is what God wants for every human family. To recognize the heavenly Father's love and live it on earth is the vocation proper to every family.

Toil is an integral part of work. In the current era of "everything right away", education to work "by sweating" appears to be providential. The condition of life on earth, which is only temporary and always precarious, also contemplates toil and suffering for the family, especially with regard to the work to be done for survival. However, toil from work gets meaning and relief when it is taken on not for one's selfish enrichment, but to share life's resources, both inside and outside the family, especially with the poorest, in the logic of the universal destination of goods.

Sometimes parents exaggerate when they try to keep their children from any toil. They should not forget that the family is the first school of work where one learns to be responsible for oneself and the others who live with them. Family life, with its domestic duties, teaches to appreciate toil and to strengthen the will in view of the common well-being and reciprocal good.

### **E. Listening to the Magisterium**

A Christian recognizes the value of work, but he can also see the deformations introduced into it by sin. For this reason the Christian family welcomes work as providential for its life and the life of its family members. But it avoids making work an absolute value and considers this tendency, which is so widespread today, as one of the idolatrous temptations of this era. It does not limit itself to stating a different conviction. It arranges its life so that an alternative priority will stand out. It makes its own the concern expressed in *Laborem Exercens* 9: "In work, whereby matter gains in nobility, man himself should not experience a lowering of his own dignity".

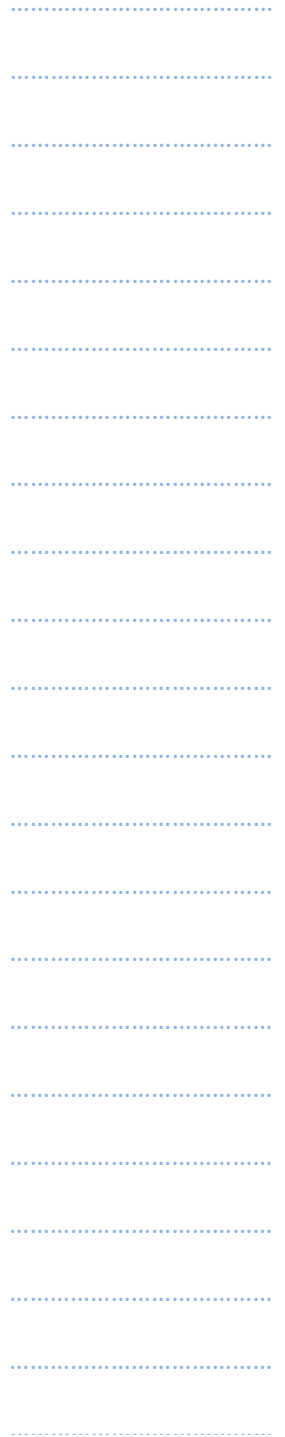
#### ***Work: a good for the person and his dignity***

And yet, in spite of all this toil-perhaps, in a sense, because of it-work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of a *bonum arduum*, in the terminology of Saint Thomas, this does not take away the fact that, as such, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind [...]

Without this consideration it is impossible to understand the meaning of the virtue of industriousness, and more particularly it is impossible to understand why industriousness should be a virtue: for virtue, as a moral habit, is something whereby man becomes good as man. This fact in no way alters our justifiable anxiety that in work, whereby matter gains in nobility, man himself should not



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experience a lowering of his own dignity. Again, it is well known that it is possible to use work in various ways against man, that it is possible to punish man with the system of forced labor in concentration camps, that work can be made into a means for oppressing man, and that in various ways it is possible to exploit human labor, that is to say the worker. All this pleads in favor of the moral obligation to link industriousness as a virtue with the social order of work, which will enable man to become, in work, “more a human being” and not be degraded by it not only because of the wearing out of his physical strength (which, at least up to a certain point, is inevitable), but especially through damage to the dignity and subjectivity that are proper to him. [Laborem Exercens, 9]

## **F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group**

### *Questions for the couple*

1. Do we support each another in our respective professional efforts?
2. Do we look with interest for occasions to do some manual work together?
3. Do our children understand the toil of work and the value of money earned through effort and hard work?
4. Do we also share the proceeds from our work with the poor?

### *Questions for the family group and the community*

1. How does the economic crisis affect the lives of our families?
2. In our Christian communities is there concern for those who are unemployed or have precarious, poorly paid or unhealthy jobs?
3. What concrete choices can the family make to educate little children to “safeguard creation”?
4. Do forms of slavery still exist in the labor world? How can they be broken down, confronted and overcome?

## **G. A commitment for family and social life**

## **H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father**

## **I. Closing hymn**



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