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DIGNITY OF LABOUR: LESSONS FROM ST JOSEPH THE CARPENTER OF NAZARETH

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Abstract

Work, in our time, is a major concern in many respects; more than ever people seem engaged in different activities, but meaninglessness shrouds. It prompts us to think of the fundamentals – the right to work, the reason for work, its nature, and its dignity that will make clear not only the purpose and various dimensions of work but also evince that work is not a curse, but a redeeming action. A theological and philosophical reading into the life of St. Joseph, a worker par excellence, is done to find out the lessons from his 'way of doing' in order to better understand the dignity of work and to get a right attitude towards work, so to say – to love work and to become lovable by work.

Keywords: Active and Contemplative Life; Dignity of Work; Integral Work; Redemptive Work; Self-Realization; Work

Introduction

Technological as well as knowledge revolution has brought a transformation in the attitude towards and the understanding of work. Besides, there exists in the daily grind the ennui of it, on one hand, and the feeling of working without bettering the doer and the situation, on the other hand. Work found indispensable for sustenance can go beyond a servile condition to an expression of love and justice, and one's own being. Work could be perceived from different perspectives, but our attempt is to see theologically through

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the life of St Joseph, the worker in line with the Church documents, and philosophically too. Work is not exhausted by sweating in order to subjugate the earth; it is to do with becoming subjects of our doing so as to increase human dignity and also that of the work. St. Joseph, the worker, shows that work could be perceived differently so as to see its rich meaning and the possibility of higher realization in life.

1. Work, not an Appendage

The working man of Bethlehem and later in Galilee as one doing mechanical trade¹ or Joseph, the carpenter as known to people might not have been very famous on account of the status of his blue-collar occupation. Nevertheless, his very work revealed him to others, not to mention, how it disclosed to God that He found him fit to be the spouse of Mary of Nazareth and foster father of Jesus. The trade Joseph practised for the sustenance of the family has brought work closer to the mystery of salvation. "Along with the humanity of the Son of God, work too has been taken up in the mystery of the Incarnation, and has also been redeemed in a special way."² Though toiling was seen as a curse and evil in the creation narratives, work becomes redemptive and meaningful where one goes out of oneself and reveals: it becomes a boon in the sense of self-revelation and self-realization. In the case of the first parents, their actions revealed them and they realised the repercussions of their doing: it was a process of an introvert movement, unlike in the case of St Joseph, forcing them to hide back due to shame and guilt.

Work is part of our very nature, not imposed on us or something we choose, but we discover its significance and meaning we realize what we are. The command 'to toil and live' and its resacralization, demanded of every man of faith in the given particular context, makes us part of the God-human interactions and in the creation of a just and lovely world. Do the nature and the social dignity of work matter in it or is it the human attitude and commitment that enhances the dignity of work? The life of Joseph endorses the latter clause. On his selection for a new mission and its combining with his daily occupation embellishes better meaning and projections for future

¹Various opinions exist with regard to the exact nature of his profession, the traditionally held view is of carpenter that can mean a workman in any material such as in iron, silver gold, stone or any material. The best certified tradition sees him as a workman in wood. Edward Healey Thompson, *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, Dublin: M.H Gill & Son, 96, 99.

²John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989), #22.

generations over the widely held societal and cultural understanding of work—as imposed/selected task or inevitably toilsome, etc. Whatever could be the permutations of the work in a society and its significance in relation to the assigned value and the social status in our time, one can find a protagonist of a genuine and committed worker in Joseph who carried out work as a calling that consists in doing things altruistically and ingeniously always with a hermeneutical orientation. Work only discloses the agent and becomes redemptive to the extent it accomplishes this task, based on the conviction, *I work, therefore, I become faithful and just*. We just see how Joseph approached the work before getting into a theological understanding of it.

2. Joseph, a Carpenter

As a gifted man as well as a just man, he could not remain idle and inactive because the rights of others have a claim over his skilled workforce, to fulfil what is due to them. Further, he had a right as well as obligation stemming from the additional roles he embraced. “Every man is bound to employ profitably the gifts he has received from God whether spiritual or corporal, each according to his state of life.”³ Whatever could be the nature of his work, Joseph is the most sublime model of a labouring man; what matters is not what he did or where, but how he did in view of the realization of his mission. Though he had the legacy of royal blood, he embraced his destiny in a humble and laborious occupation whereby he could only support the family but also respond to the divine call. Not looking at the occupation as degrading or as stratified on social scales, his commitment emanated from his mission intended by God who wanted to maintain and redeem the creation. This sense helped him to accept his lot as a carpenter without any reservation and see it well-placed in the plan of God. To put it in theological terms, “Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption.”⁴ In the case of Joseph, it could be said that - the Lord will wait for them, who wait for the Lord; they will be renewed in strength, they shall walk without fainting.⁵ The mystery of redemption as part of work teaches us that no material situation and momentary troubles are bad or ill-fated where God dwells. “It is true that the condition of the lowly has nothing shameful in it, and the work of the labourer is not

³Thomson, *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, 98.

⁴John Paul, *Redemptoris Custos*, #22.

⁵Cf. Isa: 40:31.

only not dishonouring, but can, if virtue be joined to it, be singularly ennobled.”⁶

After receiving the message from the Lord through the Angel, one sees Joseph on move and in action; he remains laborious. The acceptance of revelation in silence and total submission stands as an allusion to what Prophet Amos 3;7 says, “the Lord God does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets.” What was revealed to him was not a temporary project of small duration; his role as a worker has wider reverberations as far as humanity and its redemption was concerned. It is not the repute and stature of the project or work, but the purpose and its realization make it significant, impressive and great. Every work is noble and dignified the way it betters or perfects the world and builds up all those involved and affected. For work is inherently good when the telos of it remains unaffected. However, the goodness of work may vary depending upon the manner and the extent goodness is facilitated. A philosophical and theological understanding of work will justify our search for meaning and dignity of work in the phenomenal world that will be done in line with the thought of Hanna Arendt later.

3. Worker with a Sense of Integral Vision

In our time when employment is deemed a catchword for security and equated with the goal of education involving big competition and people seek greener pastures beyond the borders, particularly, in the third-world countries, St. Joseph, a migrant worker, makes us rethink our priorities and goals, the purpose of work, ultimately, the purpose of life, misconceived as accumulation for future. Undeniably, work seems to be the centre of human life and the restlessness seems unending until the purposes ahead get clear or until the right realization of the really the real good takes place. In the words of Pope John Paul II “human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man’s good.”⁷ Bereft of spiritual as well as moral goods pertaining to the subjective dimension of work, it may have only a material face-value to which all our efforts are often directed whereby work becomes a dehumanizing phenomenon.

As a carpenter, his work as a means of livelihood, service to the society, solidarity with the needy and part of his mission, St. Joseph

⁶Leo XIII, Encyclical *Quamquam Pluries* (15 August 1889), # 4.

⁷John Paul II, Encyclical, *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981) # 3.

enhanced the beauty of his profession, though he seemingly did not care for the objective dimensions like success, prosperity, productivity and profitability, very much valued by the societal standards irrespective of place and age. It is important to hold that “human work not only proceeds from the person, but it is also essentially ordered to and has its final goal in the human person.”⁸ The preference of the objective dimension to the subjective dimension reduces man as instrumental value or lucrative value—not having a value in himself as a value giver. Joseph’s hard work was not for making himself moneyed but intrinsically linked with the realization that he must work for the dependents, further obliged by the divine commandment to him in the capacity of the foster-father. By doing so, he taught his son to work and everyone who looks at him, the metaphysical meaning of human labour without denying completely the physical aspects of work in productivity.

4. Understanding Work Differently

Everyone born is equipped with or entitled to work in one’s own unique fashion. Starting with one’s existence and going inevitably through the hurdles and hardships of various activities one has to finally end up in *Existenz*.⁹ This realization of infinite possibilities could be accomplished through one’s work along with reason and faith. Though one cannot conceptually envisage or clearly define everything one does, one’s vision of life, response to the mission and to arising needs influence or modify it. A man of faith, like St. Joseph, could revisualize his plan in the midst of changing existential factors before him; though incomprehensible or incalculable, he is not at all shattered. His ‘yes’ in the reflective silence to the new demands of the situation, full of paradoxes and antinomies, made him not run away or make a retreat. His faith in God and no distrust in the people or vice-versa made him realize the best possible path in accordance with the divine commandment for the advent of the redeemer and the redeemed age. Pope Francis affirms that whatever Joseph did, was a “means of participating in the work of salvation, an opportunity to hasten the coming of the Kingdom to develop our talents and

⁸Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2005, 272.

⁹Linking it to the notion of Karl Jaspers on *Existenz* – the eternal in man, the ideal self that is surrounded by boundary situations, pushes them back as in the experience of full freedom. Man with his existential struggles in and through work-tiresome, exhaustive, boring though, experiences the possibilities of meaning, beauty and authenticity.

abilities, and to put them at the service of society and fraternal communion.”¹⁰

The work in view of the family in order to keep it stable and together makes Joseph’s work more relational and goal-oriented that he does not badly feel the vulnerabilities of the antinomies in life nor their burden. This relationality and the consequent commitment, not based on any consanguinity, made the family at Nazareth holy. In other words, the capacity to be life-givers and transformers of the situation makes us holy. This holiness leads to a sense of wholeness (I am not alone and I am not whole without others) and opting for it one joins with the creator. In the words of Pope Francis, “working persons, whatever their job may be, are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us.”¹¹ Wherever and whenever man participates in the plan of God, it is also a celebration¹² of the divine commandment of caring for the home (earth) and ‘eating from the sweat of your brow’ (Gen 2:15; Gen 3: 19). In other words, when work becomes a sign endorsing the inherent value of work or truly witnesses to the very act and provides an added value, there arises the dignity of work to its height. Consequently, both doer and beneficiary realize the meaning of it on different levels—social, economic, psychological, religious. There could be a shift from value to meaning; meaning is nothing other than the source and aggregate of all values in the right order. Joseph found the *bonum* in the phenomenal; possibly, as in the case of many, but the disposition and unfailing faithfulness in doing the routine against the odds led him to *summum bonum*, namely the saviour of the world. In the words of Pope Pius XII, no worker was ever more completely and profoundly penetrated by it than the foster father of Jesus, who lived with Him in closest intimacy and community of family life and work.”¹³

The question and reflection who St. Joseph is, specifically, in the context of the holy family, the answer is guardian, provider and protector. In a different context of work today points pertaining to these aspects – whether work gives provision, security and growth could be better understood by looking at the conceptual difference existing in the world of work. They are very much related to just wage, decent workplace and self-satisfaction and meaning which do

¹⁰Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* (8 December 2020), #6

¹¹*Patris Corde*, #6

¹²Cf. *Patris Corde*, #6.

¹³Homily (19 March 1966): *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, IV (1966), 110.

not deal here. We now see theologically and philosophically the different realizations possible in work.

5. From Job to Vocation

Joseph as a young Jewish man might have thought of his career and envisaged plans for his life, as every young man of his culture and place might be doing until the angel appeared to him. With an added mission, the very job he proved skilful gets another perspective. It was no more a job-oriented to earning the livelihood, but a mission the obligation which has no limit. He was not keen on the maximum production and earning based on any utilitarian calculus; instead, he paid due attention to the different roles he had to play without complaining of workload or its ennui as we hear it in our time more than ever.

Though the divine commandment to eat from the sweat of one's brow entails everyone to work, it is, for some, necessary to survive, for a decent life, and for some to become more and have more inexhaustibly. The need for continuous labouring cannot be ruled out in order to do struggle with the capricious conditions of life when an unprecedented situation like covid-19 surges. However, one should have a conceptual clarity of it especially when we consider St Joseph as a model worker. For Hanna Ardent, 'labour' is aimed at only maintaining or reproducing life and out of impending necessity, often doing something like a cog in the wheel without creative use of freedom. She finds it more typical to the animal kingdom.¹⁴ Though labour is indispensable many tend to include it in the prime vocabulary of ordinary life and do not move upward. But we find that St. Joseph, a skilled labourer, goes a level further and finds in it a vocation, a special call and a vision in alignment with the given situation he accepted in freedom and faith. Consequently, he was found qualified for God's enterprise and he was free for that because his life was not entangled to mere survival needs and practical concerns; he was disposed to the role of a just man, namely, doing what is expected of a gentleman and what situations demanded of him. Heeding to God's voice and will make him versatile as well as correspondingly responsible – a sign of a just man who can transcend one's needs for a just cause and a higher need; a movement from the sense of inevitable hardship of labour to a sense of fulfilment of

¹⁴Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 83.

vocation. If labour has only a single role to play, vocation is open to multi-roles without slavish attitude and compulsion. We learn that

Joseph became the guardian, the administrator, and the legal defender of the divine house whose chief he was. And during the whole course of his life, he fulfilled those charges and those duties. He set himself to protect with a mighty love and a daily solicitude his spouse and the Divine Infant; regularly by his work he earned what was necessary for the one and the other for nourishment and clothing; he guarded from death the Child threatened by a monarch's jealousy, and found for Him a refuge; [...].¹⁵

6. Vocation to Calling

Vocation is often tagged with a religious meaning; however, it implies, as its root meaning, a heeding to a voice or following an inspiration or path heartily. When carried to the secular realm, it signifies any work that makes a living possible. Reflecting over Joseph and his added mission, vocation could be understood as “a calling that merges our mission in life with God’s mission on earth.”¹⁶ I may put it differently, it is responding to the active obvious interventions of God in the context that one feels. We have seen above that Joseph as a carpenter pursued his vocation in the routine work without any external change, but the motivation and end goal transcended the ordinary level. The fruit of his toil and everyday experiences are seen differently with a vision of the given mission in the context of the holy family. They are much more than a means to survival open to a wider world distinct from the subjective perspectives and views; borrowing Arendt’s vocabulary, it could be the level of work.¹⁷

The reality of a factual world other than one’s usual world emerges—the family, its needs, its multi-layered relationship, the immediate context with its predicaments, etc. He adapts to different circumstances with the positive attitude of those who do not grow discouraged when life does not turn out as they wished; he showed

¹⁵Leo, *Quamquam Pluries*, # 3.

¹⁶https://www.goshen.edu/news/bulletin/02march/job_career.php

¹⁷Human experience has a lion’s share in work and it creates a world to live in and we contribute to it through the means of work. Work transforms nature and time; so to say that it becomes human time rather than natural time. Work is of higher level than that of routine doing and it transforms world and makes it humanized. Ref: Arendt, *Human Condition*, 95-98.

the willingness typical of those who live to serve.¹⁸ The work he does and his planning in Egypt and Nazareth is governed by the lofty goal of the added mission, namely, protection and care of the holy family. It is not done for its own sake or in any supernatural manner, but responding promptly and unreservedly without disorientation from the commitment. Vocation often deemed to be an individual and an unmistakable call from God gets affirmed only when one realizes what is to be done in the context to perfect the mission in the way God intends; then, ordinary acts become extraordinary in their effects that will beget and renew lives of others.

Joseph realized the vocation by intersecting and integrating his engagement with the action of God in the world. The immediate concern of his every engagement was unfailingly in relation to the ultimate purpose, so as to say, the redeeming vision and mission; he follows what is told and does whatever seemed necessary to tread the path leading to this direction. Pope Francis puts it: "Joseph had to change his plans and take a risk, sacrificing his own plans in order to follow the mysterious designs of God, whom he trusted completely."¹⁹ His silence was an eloquence for his 'fiat' at the annunciation of his vocation to him and a proof of his unwavering and undivided commitment to it till his death. Though it was often ambiguous, he did not fail to respond to it by rendering to God, Mary, Jesus and everyone what was their due. "The silence of Joseph has its own special eloquence, for thanks to that silence we can understand the truth of the Gospel's judgment that he was "a just man."²⁰ One who is chosen by God for His own work realizes his/her vocation day by day both by contemplation and actions that justify him/her provided that he remains at the side of Jesus as Joseph, the worker, conveys.

As many today face the tension in combining the secondary roles and primary role, active life and contemplative life, Joseph becomes a star from Nazareth; his constant care and undivided commitment. In

¹⁸Message of Pope Francis for the 2021 World Day of Vocations, (24 April 2021), "St. Joseph: The Dream of Vocation." https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco_20210319_58-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html. Like Joseph of the Old Testament, St. Joseph believed, God had destined him for a purpose (Gen: 37; 5-11) and he also prefigures people who St. Paul alludes to with the advice that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom: 8; 28).

¹⁹Francis, Message, "St Joseph: The Dream of Vocation."

²⁰John Paul, *Redemptoris Custos*, #17.

the words of Pope Francis, it is attentive care and loving generous service closely linked with fidelity. "He did not yield to the temptation to act rashly, simply following his instincts or living for the moment."²¹ A parallel and more obvious episode is found in the conversation with another chosen man in the Gospel of John, before entrusting the Church to his care. Jesus asks peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (Jn: 21;15). Indeed, love is the core of every vocation and it depends how we fall in love and remain there without out falling down. "In Joseph, the apparent tension between the active and the contemplative life finds an ideal harmony that is only possible for those who possess the perfection of charity. [...] we can say that Joseph experienced both love of the truth-that pure contemplative love of the divine Truth [...]." ²² The easing of the tension was facilitated because of the contemplation on love of the divine truth and also on the practical demands of love in the concrete context. The conflation of contemplative love and active love or love in practice would prompt one sense of higher calling.

A direct and distinctive command of God for a particular task is what we understand by calling in the Bible like the call of Moses, Aaron, the prophets, Mary, Joseph etc. In the literature, both vocation and calling are often found used interchangeably. Even in the Bible, we see a direct calling for a particular task and for a general task.²³ Bryan J. Dik and Ryan D. Duffy propose a distinction of both that would help us understand the dignity of work in a different manner. For them, these concepts have three overlapping dimensions, namely, "(a) a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, (b) to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness," (c) "that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation."²⁴ Of the three, vocation consists of the second and third dimensions while calling has all the three dimensions.

²¹Francis, Message, "St Joseph: The Dream of Vocation."

²²John Paul, *Redemptoris Custos*, #27.

²³Though the calling of the biblical characters has a mission to fulfil, one can find that some of them are individually called for a special task. The call of the prophets, Titus, Barnabas, Paul and can be differentiated from the calling of Mary, Joseph, John, the Baptist, etc.

²⁴Bryan J. Dik, Ryan D. Duffy, Brandy M. Eldridge, "Calling and Vocation in Counselling: Recommendations for Promoting Meaningful Work." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 40, 6 (2009), 626.

For many, work bears on internal reasons and a sense of meaning towards other-oriented ends. But there are some, who along with these, link it with an external source or reason, like God, or a particular mission.²⁵ Joseph's 'yes' to the commandment of God is seemingly irrational and foolish, so to say, even his right and freedom is curtailed, not to mention of the added responsibility of family and its protection falling on his shoulders. What motivated him to go against rational standards that in no way guaranteed the acknowledgement and applause of the society as reward? The obvious reason is the transcendent summons to which he submitted all his rights and plan: took Mary as his wife; took the child and his mother, and fled to Egypt, etc. "He turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home."²⁶

Though the transcendent summons appears in time and place, it is continuous as the appurtenance of call demands a constant and faithful orientation in humble submission. The transcendent summons, though demanding and apparently anti-logic, is appropriable for a man of faith, for a just man and for a man of values and convictions. This would necessarily affect not only job satisfaction and self-fulfilment but also the highest possible realization – the feeling that 'I am fine with what I do and what I have.' Any temporary factor linked with work like pain, struggle, disrespect, unattractive, manual work, local, less-paid, so on might disorient one from the sense of calling. This temptation would defeat the dignity of work itself; the dignity of work ascents not in simply being productive and useful, but when it becomes redeeming.

The feeling of calling within our vocation will not bereft us of a sense of deep alignment between what we do and what we should do. Not responding to the call may gradually give rise to a feeling of not worth doing it—a crisis. On the contrary, an emotional connection to work, duty and responsibility without complaints could be found in those who have a constant sense of calling. They are luminous personalities who increase the dignity of work, irrespective of what they do. They may not be powerful and influential on par with a world standard index or academically competent or widely known, but with fire within for a mission and

²⁵Dik, Duffy, Eldridge, "Calling and Vocation," 626.

²⁶Francis, *Patris Corde* #1; also, *Insegnamenti di Paolo*, 110

making it vibrant. The words of St. Paul sound relevant in this respect; “consider the time of your calling: Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were powerful; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor: 1;26)

Placing calling in the framework of the view of Ardent, it is in the realm of action. According to one’s realization of vocation one will work; the exceptional way of doing could be attributed to an ‘experience of calling.’ As part of a system, as a member of a group, the frequency and quantity of work would be the same, but the manner in which work is done and its influence is seen on others make them unique and distinguishable from the species identity as fathers, mothers, lectures, doctors, priests, etc. Ardent says, “In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.”²⁷ Elsewhere she states, “Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; these are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua men*.”²⁸ The insignificant life and work of Joseph as an ordinary Jewish man in constrained circumstances proved great in the history of salvation for his faith – to go ahead, to courageously withstand the odds, to rise above the conventions and the norms and to abide firmly by convictions. “The smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of [...] boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation.”²⁹ His ‘fiat’ to God followed by constant ‘yes’ in silence and engagement humble works without murmuring could change the history of mankind that made him unique and distinct. St. Joseph leaves a distinctive narrative that describes how to be dignified through work and how to give work dignity beyond a servile, biological and utilitarian views of work.³⁰

7. Dignity of Work in ‘Work in Love’

²⁷Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.

²⁸Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

²⁹Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190.

³⁰The passive traditional view says that towards the end of the hidden life of Jesus, the Joseph’s work could have been over with his mission. Still he continues his work though and keeps up the dignity of the same.

Mary, remaining virgin, became the mother of God and Joseph, remaining 'just, took the responsibility of a father. Though seemingly paradoxical and challenging, what made it possible is love that served the purpose without losing dignity. She was blessed as we read in the *Magnificat*: what about Joseph, a man adorned and acknowledged with the highest attribute 'just,' who loved Mary and Jesus' duly and the way they deserved it? On knowing the astonishing motherhood of his future wife, he is made courageous (do not be afraid); he was prudent to ahead without bringing any ill-reputation to her and he loves the mother and child to that extent of becoming a medium for revealing God's love for humanity through the gift of the Word. If love defined Joseph's attitude, it was justice that motivated his actions. His love for the holy family was 'just' not because of any sympathy or a special concern towards the woman and child, but because of 'obedience in faith' to God who always guides whenever one's thinking, judging and willing is submitted to God or to His plan.

Joseph proved himself 'just' in responding to the 'love invitation' extended to him as it was so in the case of the chosen ones; perfecting it concretely in a way human beings understand, namely, bound by a husband's love and father's love. By the "obedience of faith man freely commits himself entirely to God, making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals,' and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him."³¹ In committing oneself to it in a context justly, he proves that God is love. When such manner of love is reserved or diverted, one proves oneself unjust whereby s/he also attests that God is not lovable.

St Joseph, not just intended to love but he was determined to meet the demands of love. As a worker, he converted love into action and his actions were humanizing, giving a better face to both the doer and one receiving the benefit; only then an action can be called just. While the tendency to regard the most rewarding work as the best and its dignity measured by relative factors like income, incentive, comfort, fast, attractive, trendy etc., St. Joseph reminds every action, irrespective of its value attributed by society from time to time, is good and of great dignity, provided it reveals the goodness in the doer; goodness is let flow to the other, and it makes the situation

³¹John Paul, *Redemptoris Custos*, #4; also see, Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum* (18 November, 1965), #5.

more humane. In nutshell, good is made visible and experienceable in love.

Conclusion

Work is the foundation of existence and its vibrancy is part of natural right without which one's existence will be threatened. More than ever, people seem more engaged as far as the time and movement factors are concerned. However, there seems to be a lacuna in rightly understanding work, in its performance and the way it is looked at. Are there good work and bad work in themselves? Should the outcome be the only criterion to gauge the dignity of work? Looking into the life of St. Joseph as a worker, we were trying to see how the theological understanding of work as vocation and calling and with a philosophical analysis of it like labour, work and action give a better understanding of work. It is no more status and reward of the work or that of the doer that make work dignified, but its source and motivation, namely love. Every action that humanizes the world or that makes both the doer and beneficiary more human, is of dignity; the amount of love involved in it makes it more dignified.

I conclude with a narrative that shows the confusion of or the disorder in the primary and secondary purposes of work leading to the loss of dignity of work that will be relevant when we think St. Joseph, as a worker of a trade and his call to a particular mission. Our times witnesses a number of people sent abroad for missionary and pastoral needs. With the change of time and attitude, the service dimension of this ministry is eclipsed by the status of a profession, later worse, a purely monetary dimension appears bigger, namely, primary purpose gives way to a secondary purpose. While it becomes an attraction for many, and for a few an addiction in the sense that without it they cannot manage or they do not want to do anything out of this track. The spirit and dignity of the noble ministry gets depleted. If they are to be regained, the antidote is to get rid of the addictive dimension, namely, the secondary dimension that would mean, we work not primarily to earn a livelihood, but out of our sense of vocation, to keep people entrusted to us closer to God and men. If that is possible, the dignity of ministry crops up and secondary factors do not become criteria of valuation.