

Daily Meditation 03-11-24

Why Human Work Counters Despair & Is a Path to Holiness

Good morning.

We've been talking for a couple of weeks now, at least, about good workers, about people who accomplish something in their time on Earth, that moves the rest of us, that inspires us, that teaches us to be generous and courageous and giving -- and not to waste our time while we're here. People like Alexei Navalny, to Dorothy Stang, Martin Luther King, Jr. Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth. Tomorrow, we'll be speaking about Harriet Tubman.

But it all comes together, I think, around the issue of what I'd call "the sacrament of work." One of my favorite themes, on which I built a university, the University of Creation Spirituality, which flourished and impacted a lot of people for a nine-year period -- this idea that everyone who is a midwife of grace, is a priest. That the archetypal meaning of priesthood, is being a midwife of grace.

In our time, the priesthood is under a lot of flux and criticism and evolution. And I think it's important at this time, to go back to the original meaning, the archetypal meaning, to regain the energy and the meaning, the deeper meaning of something like our professions.

And, of course, I've been talking recently, necessarily, about the Supreme Court, the profession of the legal profession. And citing a retired lawyer, who commented on one of my Daily Meditations, about his exasperation with his profession at this time. And I think all of us need to criticize our professions -- not just our bosses, not just our salaries, not just the circumstances around our place of work. But the deeper, the spiritual profession.

We're here to serve. How can the legal profession serve, instead of cozying up to autocrats and the rest, selling their souls? How can our medical professions truly serve? Our educational professions?

I've been involved in critiquing religion, and therefore priesthoods, for my entire adult life. And I have a few wounds and bruises to show for it. But also in critiquing education, because I think both are so important for a culture to thrive, and to allow spirituality to happen -- and play their important role in developing it, and seeing it come to maturity and fruition.

So a lot of my time has been not just criticizing, in the sense of saying "no, no" to education, but offering alternatives. And as to the priesthood too, I've offered alternatives to the way the Mass is, for example -- instead of reading from books, which is such a 16th century modern idea, because we were so thrilled at ourselves for inventing printing presses. Which we should be: printing and writing books, and reading. All that's very important. And I have tried to make my contribution in that regard too.

Just this past week, I received a great gift in the mail. A beautiful edition of my book on "The Hidden Spirituality of Men: 10 Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine," in Korean. The Korean publishers published that this week. They've published about ten of my books, translated them in [South] Korea; this is the latest. I was moved by that, I was pleased; as a writer, of course one wants to be able to spread the news.

So in today's meditation, I close with a wonderful passage from Thomas Aquinas on work, and another one from the Bhagavad Gita. So notice, talking about Work and Spirituality, Work and the Sacred, about being midwives of grace. This is a universal phenomenon. This is an archetype in itself. And we can draw in all the world traditions, which I do in my book on Work: Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam too, Sufism. All of our traditions have something worthwhile and profound even, to say about Work and Spirituality.

Here's another quote from Thomas Aquinas, that I have in my conclusion chapter of "The Reinvention of Work," page 307. He says,

Everything gives pleasure to the extent that it is loved. Everything is pleasure; when extended, it is love. It is natural for people to love their own work, it is natural for people to love their own. Thus, it is to be observed that poets love their own poems. Is that true? I think it's true. And the reason is, that we love to be, and to live. These are made manifest in our action. To be is a loving thing, a wonderful thing, something we're grateful for. To live is a wonderful thing, and something we're grateful for. But both are manifest in our action, in our work. Secondly, the second reason why we love our work, is that we all naturally love that in which we see our own good.

Oh, that's powerful and beautiful. We see our goodness in our work. The fellow who painted this painting: he saw the goodness in his subject's work, didn't he? In the work and the life of one of the great musicians of our time. So here's a younger man who comes along, and hears the music, and puts it into another art form. The dancers, the musician, you can feel it, the colors, the liveliness of this painting. Surely the artist who did this painting, loved it, and was proud of it.

And was happy to pass it on to someone else. It happened to be me who came along, and wanted to support him.

So think about that: in how many ways do you love your work? The work may or may not be what you're getting paid for. It may not be that. That's a job. But your work, when you're really expressing yourself, when you're doing what you're here on Earth to do: It is lovable. It is good. It is part of your Original Blessing, your original goodness that you're sharing with the Earth.

So these are a few of the connections. There are many more. We'll be talking about them as we move along for the next week or two, about spiritual work and the sacredness of work. And as the lawyer says, in today's meditation: all is not lost, even in the legal profession today. In his profession, all is not lost. As I say, it is not lost because there are new workers. There are young workers. And there's a youthful person in all of us, that can rise up and give back. And that is what work is. Our giving back. Blessing for blessing. Goodness for goodness. Love for love. Joy for joy.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.