

2020 St. Joseph the Worker

1. **Sanctify your work and let your work sanctify you!** Work is the greatest gift God has given you for your sanctification, whatever that work may be. In understanding this lies your true human and spiritual maturity as a Christian.

2. **The Gospel today makes no mention of St. Joseph by name.** Joseph is identified by his work! His foster son, Jesus, is also identified by his foster father's work: "He is the carpenter's son, surely" not "Joseph's son"! Little did the neighbours know that **for Joseph, his carpenter's life was inseparable from his love of God!** "Let us examine ourselves where we are in our story of love with God." Pope Francis spoke these words in his canonization homily for St. Nunzio Sulprizio on Oct 14, 2018. They are a commentary on the place of work in the life of this young saint, who lived from 1817 – 1836. **His feast day is a few days away on May 5th.**

2. **The responsorial Psalm also turns our hearts reflectively to work!** "Give success to the work of our hands, O Lord." What is success in work? The completion of a project on time? The fact that you did your best? The fact that you were within budget and were efficient? The fact that you were able to keep it in balance with your prayer? The fact that you got no satisfaction from it even if others did? The fact that you were misunderstood in the process of its completion? **It could be all or some or none of the above.** But if it sanctified you, brought you closer to God, made you holy, you were successful. **"Give success to the work of our hands, O Lord."**

3. **The Psalm verses themselves do not focus precisely on work** but rather on the sheer shortness of life and the longing to gain something greater than the work: "Make us know the shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of heart." The psalmist reflects on how men and women are born and toil and then go back to the

dust, their life over like a brief watch in the night. **How few of us acquire that wisdom of heart that comes from work!** Our Father rested after all his work of creating, hoping we would acquire that wisdom that comes from our deep rest in work. There are two types of rest with regard to work. One comes *after* work, the one we are most familiar with. We leave behind our work for prayer and reading. But there is a rest that comes *within* the work itself. It is open to us all but only a few find it. "Give success to the work of our hands, O Lord."

4. **Nunzio Sulprizio's father, Domenico, died when the boy was just three.** His mother remarried but she died when he was just six. His stepfather treated him "harshly, showing him no affection, and hitting and humiliating him for the slightest misstep. **As a result of his work Nunzio became timid and very sensitive**" (St. Joseph of Clairval Abbey, Letter July 31, 2019). He still had his beloved grandmother, Rosaria Luciani, but barely three years later she passed to the Lord too. From his mother and grandmother had come his faith, his love for Mass and adoration. **"Give success to the work of our hands, O Lord."**

5. **At the tender age of nine, therefore, Nunzio passed to the care of his uncle,** an alcoholic, a brutal and crude and angry man. He pulled him out of the poor school he attended and put him to work in his blacksmith's shop. Nunzio worked twelve hours a day at the shop. His uncle ignored his basic needs for rest and food and hygiene. The workers at the forge would be generous with their curses and blows and blasphemies and laugh when Nunzio would plug his ears and run away. **Nunzio would learn to love God through his work.**

6. **All the drama of his sanctity unfolded through his work.** If his uncle thought he was not sufficiently obedient to him, he would

deprive him of his food. Half-starved, he would sometimes faint. Once when carrying a heavy load to an isolated farm, under his Uncle's orders, he slipped and fell into an icy pond. His leg got badly wounded and infected. The next morning, hardly able to stand, he was sent back to work: **"If you don't work, you don't eat,"** said his uncle. When he had a chance he would visit the tabernacle, where he learned to forgive: "It's what God wants! May his will be done!" he would say. **"Give success to the work of our hands, O Lord."**

7. **When a hammer fell on his foot and it became severely infected,** once again, his uncle refused him help. "If you can no longer swing the hammer, you can sit there and swing the bellows!" He chained him to the bellows to force him to work. When he finally did get help and rest, his foot never recovered. He returned to his uncle's forge: **"I do not suffer much" he said, "so long as I am able to save my soul and love God!"** He was still only 15 years old. Putting our heart into our work is doing it for the love of God, regardless of its trials and setbacks. **It is what "give[s] success to the work of our hands."**

8. It is this love of God that Jesus learned from Joseph's example of work and suffering. **It trained him for 30 years for that final work of the Cross** where His heavenly Father brought to success the work of his foster father Joseph, and his own work, the Eucharist. Sanctify your work and let your work sanctify you! "Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life" (Jn 6:27). Work is the greatest gift God has given you for your sanctification, whatever that work may be. **"Give success to the work of our hands, O Lord."**