

Fifth Sunday of the Year

What is the difference between a job and a vocation? How would you answer that question? I have a relative in Poland who runs a bar and restaurant and in the early part of the pandemic he and his staff adjusted their operations so that they could provide hot meals to hospital staff who were working extra hours and not necessarily having time to prepare a meal for themselves. This was featured in a magazine article which I was able to read on Facebook, and in this article my relative spoke of the satisfaction he got in seeing the happy faces of those who had received the meals and that this made all his extra efforts feel worthwhile. On reading that I thought and wrote a comment that 'a person is fortunate if they can have a passion for their work. Then their work is no longer just a job but perhaps a vocation'.

Today's three readings hold up four mirrors in which we can examine our lives and ask ourselves those questions about work and vocation.

In the First Reading (Job 7:1-4,6-7) Job asks if life is 'nothing more than pressed service' and compares himself to a 'workman with no thought but his wages' wondering if his eyes 'will ever again see joy'. Many people would freely admit that their work is simply the means by which they provide for their families and it holds no other significance for them. Their vocation lies elsewhere. There are of course mutual obligations between employer and employee not only in law but also in the social teaching of the Church (CCC 2426-2436). We also need to be mindful of those who have lost jobs and work because of the present pandemic and who would love to have a boring job to go to rather than being stuck at home. But what of the case where a person studies and works hard to attain a certain role with the aim of being able to make a positive contribution to wider society, but finds themselves like Job disillusioned and wondering why the days pass so slowly. This can happen in all sorts of roles that we traditionally think of as being vocational and maybe there are people listening or reading this homily who can identify with this. Is it possible to recapture and rekindle the spark that was the original inspiration?

In the Second Reading (1 Corinthians 9:16-19,22-23) Saint Paul speaks of the reward he finds in simply preaching the gospel even as he declines any financial reward. For him service is not 'hired drudgery' but a source of energy and inspiration. Perhaps another difference between a job and a vocation is that a person will do a job because they wish to be paid, whereas a person will pursue a vocation because that is for them a source of life and energy. Of course that is no reason why people doing jobs that are traditionally considered vocational should not be appropriately paid.

In the Gospel (Mark 1:29-39) we hear how Simon Peter's mother in law waited on Simon Peter, his brother, and his new friends. She had reason to be grateful to Jesus since he had cured her of a fever, but we don't know if she waited on them with joy, with gratitude, or with different feelings. Even in a family or a household the tasks that one person might find fulfilling and life giving another will find frustrating and draining.

Lastly of course we have Jesus himself. For him his life and his mission are one. To heal the sick, to cast out devils, to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel, are the very reasons that

he came to earth. He is the perfect model of what it is to live out a vocation, giving fully of himself even unto death on the cross.

So as we look at Job in his desolation, Saint Paul in his dedication to duty, Saint Peter's mother in law in her quiet domestic service, and Jesus himself in his mission, we can ask ourselves which one of them most closely reflects our reality at the moment? And if we have lost something of an earlier enthusiasm or passion then we can turn to Jesus and ask him to renew this within us, so that we too can live out our vocations whatever they maybe with joy and with love.

For video version click: <https://youtu.be/rw6fpLEwxo>