

**Homily – Optional Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker
Blessing of New Chapel at St. Joseph in Devine – May 1, 2024**

I am thrilled to be here with you, at Saint Joseph Catholic Church in Devine. The Memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker is a wonderful occasion for us to thank God for the work of those who have made this new chapel a reality. Saint Joseph taught the Son of God to work in this world. In turn, Jesus taught us about our worth – our dignity – through his own work. Let us offer the prayers of this community, through the intercession of Saint Joseph, for the unemployed and those whose work conditions do not match their God-given dignity. And let us pray for this community to continue to witness to their mission as missionary disciples of Jesus, the son of the carpenter.

The Lord's neighbors from his childhood exclaimed: *"Is he not the carpenter's son?"* Much like woodworkers do to this day, at that time they engaged in a wide range of important activities, from handcraft to construction. Carpentry has always been a key line of work in society. However, it did not ensure great earnings. We know, for instance, that at the presentation of the Child in the temple Mary and Joseph were only able to offer a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, as prescribed for the poor in the law of Moses.

Not unlike now, people were often known for their line of business. Jesus would have learned his father's trade and he was known for that. Who would expect the son of the carpenter to speak like a doctor of the law? However, taking what we heard in the first reading into account, it makes perfect sense for the Son of God to be a carpenter. It was to be expected that, in becoming Man, God would do what God commanded mankind to do from the beginning: subduing the earth and having dominion over every creature, including wood.

In the following chapter of Genesis, it says that God settled man in the garden “to cultivate and care for it.” (2:15). Some may have the misconception that work is a punishment, but nothing could be further from the truth. The punishment for disobedience to God – in the symbolic language of the book of Genesis – is the weariness that comes from hard labor, attesting to the sentence: *“By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread...”* (Gn 3:19). As Pope Francis has explained, *“Work is an anointing of dignity.”* The inherent dignity of every human person, fully revealed by Jesus, must be met by dignified life and working conditions.

The Lord’s inherited job also witnesses to the gap of dignity represented by exploitation and unemployment in our world. We do not need to look too far to realize that at the heart of the problem of undocumented immigration – for example – lies exploitation and trafficking. Both crimes strip those who are exploited of their dignity, next to all those who then have to offer their work in inequitable conditions. Giving someone a fairly paid employment position, or simply a job to do, dignifies that person. In turn, a job well done dignifies both the wage earner and those who benefit from his or her work.

Work is not just a means to put bread on the table. Hard work is also a means by which we express our dignity and ourselves. Through work we feel useful. Work makes us resemble God Incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth, allowing our spiritual life to become concrete service to others for the love of God.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe look after all workers, including those in this community. And may she help us get to know Saint Joseph more and learn from him.