
A Plan of Life

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Need for a plan of life

OUR LIVES nowadays are so filled with activities that if we want to maintain our social relations and not overlook other important aspects of life, we need to organize ourselves, plan things out, and avoid leaving things to last minute improvisation. In short, we need what we might call a “plan of life.” This plan must be specific and yet flexible, adapted to the changing circumstances of the life of an ordinary person. It should include time for one’s professional work or study, family, and apostolate, while at the same time fostering a synthesis or unity of life which should be characteristic of every Christian. Such a plan should not be considered a straitjacket but, rather, more akin to the rails along which a train, symbolizing one’s life as a Christian, moves swiftly and safely.

A personalized, fully thought-out plan will enable us to accomplish more with the time we have available, and will help us realistically to set our goals. It should embrace both the human and the spiritual aspects of life. For a Christian, a full life is but an ordinary one lived in a Christian manner. Religious formation and a well-developed interior life are essential for sanctifying human activities and, at the same time, making them instruments of apostolate.

When electrical engineers are planning a high-tension line, they mark out the tower sites at distances that prudently take into account the shape of the terrain. From these will be suspended the cables along which electrical current will pass, providing power to homes and businesses. If the towers are set too far apart for aesthetic or other reasons of convenience, the cables will be stretched too far, compromising their utility. This image can help us understand the importance of certain norms of piety that should factor into our plan of life, in order to sustain throughout the day the supernatural dimensions of our being. Distributed prudently, taking into account our daily activities, they are like the towers of a high-tension line upon which our interior life is mounted. If we spread them too far apart, because they take time from our daily pursuits or are otherwise inconvenient, our humanity will be without supernatural light. To fulfill these norms, to live them, to love them, is to care for our interior life and in turn draw closer to God.

What follows are some norms of piety practiced by many ordinary Catholics in their daily lives.

1. The morning offering

Beginning our day with a “Hello, Lord” is a good way to launch us quickly out of bed, like the soldier who overcomes his fear and leaps from the trench to the attack. To be able to get up and have one’s whole day ahead is a great gift. This in itself merits a thank you. Although incommensurate with such a great gift, what we can offer is a “heroic minute” of punctuality. I realize that sanctity is not something abstract; nor is virtue, dedication, or vocation. What I have is today: a day filled with a thousand small details and perhaps from time to time something a little more momentous. The Lord has given me this day in order to sanctify myself in it. I must sanctify myself, then, by means of the concrete things of this day; in them I must live my

dedication to and love for God. In them I can make a reality of my vocation and love my neighbors. They are the raw material out of which my sanctity is made. A sports team feels a greater obligation to perform well when it is playing before its hometown fans; in similar fashion, the morning offering presents our Lord with the day's work and thus obliges us at least to try to carry it out with greater nobility, elegance, and finesse. We might hesitate to make a morning offering, for fear that it is ridiculous to promise everything and when our contribution cannot but be small. "Forty centuries of glory gaze upon you," Napoleon cried out to his soldiers before entering battle—but even that is small in comparison with the numbers who may gaze upon our daily lives. God, the angels, the saints, my fellow men are all going to be watching the battles of this new day. At the end of the day, however small my own battles and victories, I will be happy if I have "fought the good fight" (2 Timothy 4:7).

More than just an act, the morning offering is an attitude of service and dedication that begins the very moment we meet the new day. It means converting the commonplaces of another ordinary day into offerings and gifts for God. It carries yesterday's resolutions into today. In this way our dedication to God takes on a corporeal, human dimension, and it is always a matter of beginning again. In the words of St. Josemaria: "Your interior life has to be just that: to begin . . . and to begin again."

The morning offering is something very personal. Each of us makes it in our own way, but we all say more or less the same thing: "Here I am Lord, because you have called me"; "I will serve you, I will be faithful to you"; and so on.

Our resolutions are always about a future we don't yet possess. The morning offering includes a resolution that will be lived and realized that day. "Today"—what a marvelous word! Out of sleep awakens the joy of a new day filled with noble ideals. Today we may appreciate the purpose, the full joy of living, working, and speaking about God, of loving others and making them happy. This is the noble attitude of a child of God who wishes to show his love for his heavenly Father.

2. Mental prayer

St. Mark gives us the schedule of one day in the life of our Lord, which begins with his morning prayer: "And rising up long before daybreak, he went out and departed into a desert place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35).

We know our Lord prayed, sometimes at length. He sought the peace of the mountainside, where he spent hours alone with his heavenly Father. He spent an entire night in prayer before he chose his apostles. He prayed surrounded by people who were awaiting a miracle in order to believe. He prayed at length and intensely in the garden and poignantly on the cross. Indeed, the gospels contain many episodes of prayer in the life of Jesus Christ.

He also encouraged his apostles to pray. Sometimes he used parables to teach them the importance of prayer: "And he also told them a parable that they must always pray and not lose heart saying, 'There was a judge in a certain town'" (Luke 18:1). He exhorted them: "Pray, that you may not enter into temptation. . . . Rise and pray" (Luke 22:40, 46). On another occasion he taught them of the efficacy of prayer: "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find. . . . If you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:7, 11).

The Lord even taught the apostles a prayer, the Our Father (Luke 11:2–4), and he told them how they should pray:

When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the street corners, in order that they may be seen by men. . . . But when you pray, go into your room, and closing the door,

pray to your Father in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. Do not multiply words, as the Gentiles do . . . for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:5–8).

To pray must be something great then, for our Lord himself prays and openly encourages others to do so. St. Josemaria offers the following thoughts on the object and purpose of prayer:

You wrote to me: “To pray is to talk to God. But about what?” About what? About him, and yourself: joys, sorrows, successes and failures, great ambitions, daily worries—even your weaknesses! And acts of thanksgiving and petitions—and love and reparation.

In short, to get to know him and to get to know yourself—“to get acquainted!”

We pray in order to hear him, and so that he will enlighten our minds and hearts.

Prayer is a very filial norm. It is the dialogue of a child of God with his Father in heaven; with Jesus Christ, our older Brother; with the Blessed Virgin, our Mother; with our guardian angel and the saints, our entire family in heaven. Sometimes we will need to rise early, just as the Lord did. It is necessary to organize ourselves well in order to find the best time to pray. Excuses may come easily—“I don’t have time,” “I don’t know how,” “they don’t hear me” – but we should recognize their falsity. When we are fully convinced that we need something or someone, when we really want to, we can always find time. For Christians, God is always someone important whom we cannot forget, lest we diminish the value of our lives and render them sterile.

Just as it is impossible to live without breathing, it is impossible to become a saint without praying. Each new day must be used well. As St. Josemaria has noted: “God does not lose battles, and if we are united to him, we will never be overcome. On the contrary, we can call ourselves victors and indeed be victors: good children of God.” Each morning we must raise our hands as Moses did. Today’s battles require the help of prayer. In order to work well we need our hands and our head; moreover, in order to sanctify our work we Christians also raise our hearts to God.

Many people find it helpful to set aside two periods each day for mental prayer: a period in the morning, when it is often easier to find some extra time just by getting up a bit earlier, and another period in the late afternoon, after work but before beginning the activities of the evening. For some this time of prayer may be during the commute to and from work. For others it might be combined with a visit to the Blessed Sacrament at the parish church or another one we pass by regularly. Prayer before our Lord in the tabernacle is ideal, if it can be arranged, but praying in any setting is always preferable to not praying at all.

Some people find it helpful to read a short section of the New Testament or some other book of spiritual writing in order to stimulate prayer. In addition to the gospels, books to aid meditation include *The Imitation of Christ* and St. Josemaria’s *The Way, Furrow, and The Forge*. Others find it very helpful, before beginning prayer, to select a topic or theme to focus on, such as the life of Christ, our Christian vocation, the apostolate, our Lady, family life, or our work.

3. Holy Mass

According to the Catechism, our duty to attend Mass is primary: “We must attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.” Furthermore: “To knowingly break one of the commandments of the Church in serious matter is a mortal sin.” Attending Mass is thus of vital importance for a Christian. From the fact that the Church requires this minimum obligation under pain of mortal sin, it is clear that the holy Mass in order to sustain our spiritual health.

In 1973 Pope Paul VI wrote:

The observance of the Sunday and holy day Mass precept more than ever retains its gravity and its fundamental importance. The Church has granted faculties to make this observance possible. The one who is conscious of the content and of the purpose of this precept ought to consider it not only a primary duty, but also a right, a necessity, an honor, and a good fortune which no intelligent and aware believer can set aside without grave reasons.

Holy Mass is the renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary in an unbloody manner. Without the merits of Christ we can neither save our souls nor sanctify our work. Nor can we give to God the glory that is due him or do apostolate. We need the Mass, for “as often as the sacrifice of the Cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on.” We should not, therefore, be content with the minimum necessary for supernatural life; the personal call to sanctity and the duty of apostolate demand more of us—daily Mass and Communion.

This point is essential: we have been born to give glory to God, and the fullest glory we can give him is through Jesus Christ: “Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.” Through holy Mass we give all the glory to God.

Holy Mass “is the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ,” and in the Mass we find the ends that are proper to every sacrifice: the end of *latria* or adoration of God the Father; thanksgiving for the redemption and all the benefits we have received; reparation for the sins we have committed; and petition for all our necessities. Little reflection is required in order to see the need we have for all of these. Without them our lives are narrow, lacking meaning and overwhelmed by the weight of our sins and our needs. To the extent that we feel the obligation of apostolate and realize that without grace all our efforts are in vain—“apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5)—we are fully convinced of the need for the Mass. It is for this reason that St. Josemaria has noted, “[A] very important characteristic of the apostolic man is his love for the Mass.” In it priest and laity are united in the most sublime of tasks, namely, the world’s redemption. For this reason, “the Mass should be the center of the entire life of the Christian community.” On it rests our interior life, the sanctification of our work—in short, our redemption and eternal life.

How, then, should we live the Mass? The first condition is our presence. Athletes often say the same sort of thing about the Olympic Games—the most important thing being there. Next, we must have a dignified posture, the correct responses, an alert mind, a heart in love, and firm resolution of the will. We go to learn, to adore, and to receive: to learn through the liturgy of the word from the scriptural readings and the homily; to adore in the sacrifice, where he is really present through the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into his body, blood, soul, and divinity; and to receive Christ himself in Holy Communion, which “is the most perfect participation” in the holy Mass. After this we add a few minutes of personal thanksgiving, recollected in holy silence following the Mass.

4. Spiritual reading

In the gospel our Lord reminds us that we Christians are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13,14). Salt gives taste and prevents corruption, while light guides and illuminates the way. How clear it is that in order to be a good Christian we need to be good salt and to possess clear light. These qualities are not improvised; nor do they come to us by direct revelation. We acquire them by reading and study.

If, like St. Paul, we want to “glory in the knowledge of Jesus Christ” until we achieve “the sublime knowledge of Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things” (Phillipians 3:8), then we must frequently read the gospels. For although “in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets[,] . . . in these last days he has spoken to us by his son” (Hebrews 1:1–2). The teachings of Jesus are principally in the gospels and in the other books of the New Testament. Attentive and serene reading of the gospels makes all of this familiar to us, and over the years we gain a deeper penetration and understanding

of revealed doctrine. Reading a passage the tenth time may uncover details that previously escaped us, as we perceive with ever greater clarity the marvelous figure of the God-Man Jesus Christ. It is only one more step to fall in love with our Lord, and in this love we will understand him better. And so, St. Josemaria has written: “May your behavior and your conversation be such that everyone who sees or hears you can say: ‘This man reads the life of Jesus Christ.’”

In addition to the gospels we should not neglect to read other good spiritual books, for “[spiritual] reading has made many saints.” Thus, the intellectual dimension also has a place in our interior life. Heart and head must be united in total dedication to God. Accordingly, spiritual reading, as the source of intellectual enrichment, is absolutely necessary. St. Francis de Sales wrote: “If prayer is the name of the sanctuary lamp, then spiritual reading is the oil that feeds it.” One who devotes a few minutes each day to spiritual reading represents accrues by the end of a year an impressive wealth of ascetical and mystical formation.

Our lives as ordinary Christians pass through different stages from infancy to adulthood. These are not just stages of physiological growth but, more importantly, steps toward intellectual and spiritual maturity. Hence our spiritual reading should be appropriate to our present stage, if we are to receive proper intellectual and spiritual formation. A spiritual director can be a great aid in choosing appropriate reading for each phase of our development.

Like the river “that always sings the same stanza but with different water,” our daily reading of the gospels and sound spiritual material gives us the same doctrine but in different forms, affording us greater profundity, solidity, and the warmth of life itself. Spiritual reading is a daily norm that enriches the head while moving the heart to serve God.

5. A visit to the Blessed Sacrament

In his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, Pope Paul VI commented on Eucharistic worship:

The faithful should not neglect each day to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, which ought to be reserved in churches in a most worthy place with maximum honor according to the liturgical laws, since this visit is proof of gratitude, a sign of love, and a duty of adoration to our Lord Jesus Christ who is present there.

If we are striving to live the reality present in the tabernacle, and our hearts are not asleep, we will not be able to pass a tabernacle where Jesus awaits us without stopping. Perhaps we do not have the time to enter the church and remain there for a moment, but we can always enter it in spirit, making acts of love and reparation, with our thoughts fixed on the tabernacle. Church steeples do more than hold up the bells and the clock; they draw our attention to the Blessed Sacrament itself. St. Josemaria has remarked: “As you make your usual way through the city streets, aren’t you happy when you discover another tabernacle?”

In *Mysterium Fidei* Paul VI also wrote:

While the Eucharist is reserved in a church or oratory, Christ is truly Emmanuel, that is, God with us. “No other nation has a God as close to us as our God.” This closeness gives us an incomparable dignity; it orders moral actions, nourishes virtue, consoles the afflicted, and strengthens the weak.

All of this certainly merits a thank you. Christ need not have remained in our tabernacles; he chose to do so out of no need of his own, but because of our need. He knew that we would need him, and in this we see the ingenuity of his love.

If there were only one tabernacle in the world, how happy we would be if we could adore him there but a few times in our lives? God has made it easier for us, however, and we should make use of this great gift. St.

Josemaria has advised: “After saying your usual prayer, tell Jesus, really present in the tabernacle, about the cares and worries of your day. And he will give you light and courage for your life as a Christian.”

By visiting our Lord we learn something not found in books, for love is born and grows through personal association. We can begin to understand something of the reason for the Eucharist only by identifying with people who love each other. Present together, their eyes say everything, almost without a need for words. “He looks at me and I look at him,” an old man told the Cure of Ars, speaking about his visits to the tabernacle. There, without realizing it, we are contemplatives: I know he is there; I really am in the presence of the Most High. One might suppose that the natural thing would be to feel small. But here the natural thing is to know that he loves you and to say to him with the confidence of St. Peter: “Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you!” (John 21:17)

6. Devotion to Mary

Consider the words of St. Josemaria: “Do you want to love our Lady? Well, then, get to know her. How? By praying her rosary well.”

This devotion is centuries-old and has been regularly recommended by the popes. It is also endorsed by the words of the Second Vatican Council: “The practices and exercises of devotion recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries are to be highly esteemed.”

Now is not a time to argue but to pray, to pray the holy rosary — “a prayer which well becomes the sense of the people of God,” in the words of Paul VI. People generally enjoy looking at their family albums — remembering their loved ones and commenting on the pictures as they pass from hand to hand. Similarly, as we the people of God are a big family, the scenes from the lives of our loved ones, Jesus and Mary, should be very dear to us. In the rosary we contemplate them.

Contemplation is an essential characteristic of the Christian life. Praying the rosary fosters this theological dimension of life as we dwell on the mysteries in the lives of our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, and then pray in a dialogue of praise and petition. And not just once but many times, for great love is never content with just a little.

The rosary is the life of Jesus, related by the Blessed Virgin and contemplated by us. A Christian who knows how to pray the rosary is like a child who knows how to cry out to his mother for her aid or consolation. There are many personal instances of this prayer: the pilgrim’s rosary prayed along the way to a shrine of our Lady during the month of May; the family rosary said in the evening on an ordinary day; the deliberate rosary on the lips of a sick person; the fast-moving rosary as one drives along the highway; the often interrupted rosary said on a crowded street or bus; the virginal rosaries in the silence of the cloister; the little rosaries in the minds of children; the well-said rosary of lovers; the well-worn rosaries of those who have been married for years; the friendly rosaries in the hands of a priest; the maternal rosaries of the sister who cares for the sick or teaches the young. All are different, and yet all are the same.

Paul VI has written: “Your rosary is a stairway; you ascend it together, step by step, approaching our Lady, which means meeting Christ.”

Another traditional devotion to our Lady is the Angelus, an invitation to take a few minutes to pray at the moment of noon, using the words of the angel and our Lady’s reply when it was announced to her that she was to be the mother of the Savior. This prayer commemorates the greatest event in the history of the world: the incarnation of the Son of God and the redemption of mankind. The Angelus points out the role of the Blessed Virgin in the work of our redemption and the intimate relation of her life with the life of Jesus.

Remembering our Lady each Saturday is another way to honor her frequently. It is “an ancient and modest commemoration,” as Paul VI called it. Among the many ways to venerate her, one is to continue

the old Christian custom of reciting or singing the beautiful and ancient hymn “Hail Holy Queen” (*Salve Regina*) on Saturdays.

7. Examination of conscience

In medieval castles, the night watch was effective and indeed indispensable. Is an enemy nearby? Are the gates secure? A sense of security and peace follow only when everything is put in order. The examination of conscience is like the night watch of our personal castles. In it we correct what has to be corrected and pronounce a sincere thanks to God, thereby allowing a real peace to settle upon us.

St. Josemaria has noted: “Examination of conscience [is a] daily task. Bookkeeping [is] never neglected by anyone in business. And is there any business worth more than that of eternal life?”

Examining our conscience enables us to know ourselves better. The ancient philosopher Thales of Miletus wrote: “The most difficult thing is to know oneself, the easiest is to criticize others.” That most difficult thing is precisely what St. Paul recommends: “Let each one examine his own deeds” (Galatians 6:4).

The examination of conscience is a sign of an active interior life, for it entails an element of personal struggle. It also presupposes humility—the recognition that we have defects, that we are worth very little, that we are sinners who want to be better. Moreover, the examination of conscience shows our love of God in the desire to rid ourselves of everything that separates us from him, and in it we seek closer union in order to love him more.

This practice can be difficult for a number of reasons—weariness after the day’s work, sleepiness, the fear that we will only discover the same things over and over again, and the disappointment of our repeated failures. For all these reasons, it is the hour to “beware of the devil that ties your tongue.”

We may begin by asking: How did I pray today? How have I treated others? How did I do my work? Then we go on to examine our faithfulness to our norms of piety, and how we have dealt with our family and friends. Throughout, we should be interested in examining the “how” of things. By considering how things have *actually* gone, we can discover how they *should have* gone, thus giving rise to our resolutions for the next day.

The examination of conscience is not a single day’s task but a daily one; for indeed, sanctity is the work of a lifetime. In a calm nightly review of each day’s activities we may be surprised to discover that our mistakes are frighteningly ordinary, and that they persist like the squeaking of a rusty wheel.

Heavy summer storms used to prompt us to bring out the water pails. Though the rain would have evaporated on its own, and it certainly would have caused no one to drown, it was nonetheless clear that the moisture might eventually ruin the floors, and so the rain merited attention. Similarly, our mistakes may be small, but they occur every day. Keep a written record of your daily examination of conscience for a whole week, and you will discover the leaks in your life. And be mindful of the adage: “Whoever does not repair the leak will eventually have to repair the whole house.”

8. Frequent confession

When Jesus asked, “Who can accuse me of sin?”, no one could reply. The same silence greeted his invitation: “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7). Two things are thus evident: Christ became like us “except in sin” (Hebrews 4:15), and the rest of us are sinners. Hence the need for the sacrament of penance, “the sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ to forgive sins committed after baptism.”

Penance is the sacrament that promotes the soul’s good health: “in it are forgiven mortal sins and even the venial sins that we confess and for which we are truly sorry.” But the value of the sacrament goes further:

It turns eternal punishment into temporal punishment and the latter it forgives in a greater or lesser degree according to the dispositions of the penitent. In addition it restores the merits of good works done before the commission of mortal sin, it gives the soul the necessary helps to avoid sinning again, and it returns peace to the conscience.

This sacrament is absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of serious sins. Contrition alone is not enough. The act of perfect contrition forgives mortal sins only if it is accompanied by a desire to receive the sacrament of penance.

Even after the soul improves, and we cease to commit grave sins, penance continues to be necessary:

In order to make progress each day with greater fervor on the path of virtue, we desire earnestly to call to mind the pious use of frequent confession, which has been introduced by the Church not without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. With it proper self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are rooted out, lukewarmness and spiritual laziness are confronted, the conscience is purified, the will is strengthened, a healthy spiritual direction is received, and the grace of God is increased in virtue of the sacrament.

In preparing ourselves to receive this medicinal sacrament, we should bear in mind the usual five conditions: examination of conscience, sorrow for our sins, purpose of amendment, confession of our sins, and fulfillment of the penance imposed by the priest.

Here, then, is a norm of piety indispensable to the interior life: the frequent reception of the sacrament of penance. As St. Josemaria has written: “Consider what depths of mercy lie in the justice of God! For according to human justice, he who pleads guilty is punished, but in the divine court, he is pardoned. Blessed be the holy sacrament of penance!”

9. Throughout the day

- *Presence of God.* A certain spirit of contemplation is proper in the life of every Christian. We should all be contemplatives in the corner of the world where we work and live. The presence of God helps make real to us this supernatural dimension of our lives.

How are we to live this presence of God? The mother with a small child walks around the house with eyes and ears attentive to the cradle. The slightest sound draws her attention to the child. We can say that this mother lives in the presence of her infant. The child remains always in her thoughts. In the same manner we should be attentive to God, never losing sight of him during the rush and activity of human events. Even the thought of our own wretchedness should lead us to desire never to be separated from him.

The way of living this norm is very personal. Everyone has his or her own way. This devotion may be inspired by an aspiration, the sight of a church steeple, an image of the Blessed Virgin, a red traffic light, greeting our guardian angel, or a thousand other little things. In the book of Genesis God says to Abraham: “Live in my presence and you will be perfect” (Genesis 17:1). Living in the presence of God is a way of living, working, walking, and praying. Living in God’s presence may inspire us in the same manner as it inspired Andre Frossard, who uttered as he left a chapel in the Latin quarter of Paris: “God exists; I have met him.”

- *Consideration of our divine filiation.* Our divine filiation—the fact that we are daughters and sons of God—is a basic truth in the economy of salvation. Our lives revolve around God. We are his adopted children, but by a special kind of adoption. When human parents adopt, the child enters their family; they give him their name and the right to inherit from them. But that child will never carry the parents’

blood in his veins; in the intimate reality of his being he will always to some extent be an outsider. But our adoption by God is not an external thing: we do have the blood of the Father which is his divine grace. We have the same grace that Jesus Christ, our older Brother, had, although we possess it in a lesser degree.

To consider our divine filiation is to become aware of the reality of our situation and to live in the light of God our Father. Everything that happens to us comes from his hand. “And we have come to know, and have believed, the love that God has in our behalf” (1 John 4:16). Here is the great secret of the interior life. Divine providence—God’s watching out for us with the love of a Father—seems the most natural thing to us.

- *Work.* Years before the Second Vatican Council, St. Josemaria was speaking of the sanctifying and sanctifiable reality of work:

Work for us is dignity of life and a duty imposed on us by the Creator, for man was made “*ut operaretur*—to work.” Work provides the means for man to share in creation; hence it is not only worthy, no matter what kind of work it may be, but it is also a means of human (earthly) and supernatural perfection. Humanly speaking, work is at the origin of earthly progress, of civilization, of well-being. We Christians are obliged to help build up the earthly city, both for reasons of charity towards all men and out of a desire for personal perfection.

In order to live well the norm of work, we need to work well—with intensity and supernatural awareness. This means we must avoid sloppiness, laziness, and pietistic pretense. Each person ought to work at what interests him and what he is naturally suited for, striving always to be a good professional person. It is likely that most of us have a long way to go to achieve this goal. We need to love our work. In a posthumously published article, former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer wrote: “The best way to succeed is to make the work one is doing important.”

- *Cheerfulness.* Cheerfulness is a virtue proper to Christians. It ought to be the atmosphere surrounding and summarizing the other norms, for it is the way we are meant to serve our Lord: “Serve the Lord with gladness.” It is the platter upon which we offer up the deeds of every day, together with our prayers and our apostolate.

But what kind of cheerfulness is it? St. Josemaria has commented: “The cheerfulness you should have is not the kind we might call physiological—like that of a healthy animal. Rather, it is the supernatural happiness that comes from abandoning everything, including yourself, into the loving arms of our Father, God.” We practice true cheerfulness because we are children of God, and there are three conditions for living it fully: total dedication, the desire to do God’s will in everything, and the conviction that St. Paul was right when he wrote, “*Omnia in bonum . . .* —for those who love God all things work together unto good” (Romans 8:28).

The Christian virtue of cheerfulness or joy indicates the fullness or depth of one’s interior life. Strong winds may whip up mad, towering waves at the surface of the ocean, but far down, in the depths, all is peace and serenity. Within one’s soul, too, despite what turmoil may exist as the surface, there is always room for the calm depth of the interior life, for joy in spite of sorrow, for peace in spite of war.

We are also mindful of the joy of serving. Consider the words two of Nobel laureates: “I was sleeping and dreamt that life was nothing more than joy. I awakened and saw that life was nothing more than service. I began to serve and I saw that service was joy” (Rabindranath Tagore). And: “There is the joy of being well and of being good; but above all there is the beauty, the immense joy of serving” (Gabriela Mistral). Without joy it is impossible to serve God well.

And we should not forget the joy of struggle: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:7–8). This is the joy of the hundred for one. The joy of making the lives of others cheerful, of making the way of virtue and of sanctity lovable, and of bringing souls closer to God.