

HOMILY

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Someone has estimated that by the time a person reaches retirement, counting both the years in school and the years given to employment, that person has spent over 100,000 hours working. This is a sizable portion of a person's life. What is the point of all these hours? Work means many, widely divergent things to different people. Is work a blessing or a curse? It can be either. It is largely up to us.

In our tradition, work was made for human beings; human beings were not made for work. Through work, God involves human beings in the continuing unfolding of creation. Just think, when God created the cattle and creeping things and all the beasts of the earth, God must have had a blast painting the stripes on the zebra, stretching the giraffe's neck, teaching an opossum how to "play possum" and designing a bird dog that would hunt close. Every form of work, yes, even that which some consider menial, truly ennobles the human person. But the human person does not exist to work constantly. Rather the human person is created by God to enjoy creation, to stand in wonder of the cosmos, and to celebrate the marvelous gift of life that comes from God's hands. We call the last task *worship*, the dual act of celebrating the mystery of God and thanking God for life.

Just last week, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, made an interesting point in his Sunday Angelus message. He warned people, including church leaders, about the danger of overwork which has become one of the greatest threats to religion in the Western World. The Holy Father cited the writings of St. Bernard, who had warned the Pope of his own time about the dangers of excessive activity. St. Bernard wrote these bold words to the Pope: "See where these accursed occupations can lead you if you continue to lose yourself in them without leaving anything of yourself to yourself." Leisure is essential for spirituality

It is no secret that many Americans today have less leisure time than our ancestors had a hundred years ago. Despite the appearance of so much “labor-saving” technology, with the steady surge in labor productivity, many people spend more time on the job than their parents and grandparents ever did. In the last twenty years, the average workweek for a married couple increased by 14 hours. The internet, computers, and cell phones have allowed the workplace to invade homes, cars, and even churches. The tightening of the job market has squeezed out more and more leisure time, forcing many people—including teenagers and children—to abandon worship.

Community activities and family time...this meltdown of leisure more than anything else slays the spiritual and reduces the human person to a mere consumer of goods.