
Self Help

A guide for Form VI students

The Meaning of work

Work is an activity that occupies the most important portion of our time, so much so that we hardly have time to think about the meaning of work and how and what it contributes to our life.

“*Work is worship*” is a cliché whose full meaning has been eroded due to overuse. It remains, however, one of the profoundest and most comprehensive reflections on work.

The contemplation of work as a means of livelihood is undoubtedly the most commonplace notion of work. Indeed, at the most down-to-earth level, we work to earn money in order to satisfy our needs. But even this layman’s view is akin to the concept of work as a sublime form of service, even if it is service to oneself and one’s needs.

In fact, work is service to oneself, in the first place. However selfish this might sound, it is the most fundamental motivation to make us work. And if one discharges one’s duty honestly and to the best of one’s capacity, then work also becomes service to others, and by extension, service to God Almighty.

Work is associated with the notion of financial independence, which is, in turn, inextricably linked with the notion of dignity. Indeed, a man who does not work is a parasite, one who consumes without producing, one who is not contributing to building the edifice of society; hence, one who deserves no respect.

Work, therefore, irrespective of its nature, is what gives man a place in society. No wonder that unemployment benefits cannot mitigate the psychological agonies of those unfortunate people who have no choice but to depend on social security services.

Is work a constraint, as some seem to think? This reasoning would imply that man is basically inclined to doing nothing and that laziness is part of his nature. When we consider the magnitude of man’s achievement through the ages, we cannot but refuse to subscribe to this view. In fact, many have literally killed themselves at work to construct the world as we know it today.

Work is certainly a way of spending our physical energy, hence the idea of “*killing*” ourselves. But it is also a way of refuelling ourselves with moral and spiritual energy. Like the Phoenix, we are reborn from our own ashes.

A good day’s work provides us with a moral tonic, which reinvigorates us so that we can discharge other functions, as members of a family, social group, community.... Someone who “*absents*” himself from work has not made room for regeneration. He not only deserves no respect from others but falls in his own eyes. In the long run, he loses his soul and starts to drift.

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It is true that the nature of work is being called upon to undergo fundamental transformations due to the accelerative thrust brought about by modern technologies.

But the functions of work and the values attached to it will most probably remain unchanged for a long time to come.