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The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

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## Several Callings

The graduate lounge of the Classics Department at Dalhousie was (and I'm sure still is) always a place of interesting conversation. Often it was left to the zeal of the graduate students to offer pro-found questions and to try to answer them. We did so based on what we were learning, and sometimes with fervent debate.

I shall never forget the moment when one student, wanting to appear provocative, asked the great political philosopher and friend of the department, Prof. George Grant, what he thought of Mozart. To which Prof. Grant replied, with equal provocation, "Mozart is God!" The room became silent with obvious implications.

On another occasion, conversation in the lounge drifted on to the subject of vocations. Dr. House was sitting with a few students when Prof. Crouse walked in, on a break from his seminar. "Robert," he asked with a clearly pejorative tone in his voice, "Do you have a job?" Prof. Crouse chuckled and replied, "Heavens no, certainly not."

This point also had obvious implications. There is a difference between having a job and having a vocation. And the difference is one of intention. Dr. Crouse was a full professor and an Anglican priest. But he held his occupation as teacher and scholar not just for the sake of earning a living, but also, and primarily, to use the gifts God had given him in the calling to which God called him.

It is an important distinction. Too often in our day, we think of a job as a way merely to "make a living." Vocations, we presume, are reserved for those called into the service of the Church, or perhaps into a noble profession, but "the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker" appear to be mere occupations of choice at best or sheer expedience at worst. We tend to think of our jobs only as how we make our money, but we really live outside of the job on the weekends!

The Christian religion has from the beginning believed otherwise. The biblical picture of work is that of vocation. God made work essential to the life of man, not as we so often view it, something accidental or burdensome. Adam was put in the garden "to dress it and to keep it." Man was made to experience his abilities and pleasures in the work he was given to do. This remained so even after the fall when man was left to labor by the sweat of his brow. But with the coming of Christ, work itself has become one way in which Christ lives through us to redeem the time. And every kind of work, whether public or private,

common or specialized, becomes a divine calling. It is all a matter of intention.

In the Prayer Book, on page 44, the prayer "For Every Man in his Work" teaches us this very thing. "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who declarest thy glory, and showest forth thy handiwork in the heavens and in the earth; Deliver us, we beseech thee, in our several callings, from the service of mammon, that we may do the work which thou givest us to do, in truth, in beauty, and in righteousness, with singleness of heart as thy servants, and to the benefit of our fellow men; for the sake of him who came among us as one that serveth, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

One could not possibly object to the person who takes a job merely in order to make a living. But to understand our work in these terms only is to miss the circumstance and calling that God has for us.

If we believe that God is our Creator and Redeemer, that the hairs on our head are numbered by his wisdom and preserved by his mercy, and that his sovereign hand guides every moment of our life, then we may be sure that the circumstances of our labor do not fall outside of his will.

It does not matter how simple or commonplace the work may be. To do it, as we pray, in truth, in beauty, and in righteousness, with singleness of heart as God's servants, and to the benefit of our fellow men, is to place our job in the realm of calling, of well-doing, and of charity. It is the place and time that we offer to God whatever our duties require, and in the exercise of our duties to find most satisfying the fact that we are pleasing to him.

With this intention in mind, what appeared to us the great burden and robbery of most of our week becomes the avenue for us to live significant lives.

And that significance is not in the final analysis a worldly measure, but a heavenly one. What we do pleases the Lord when it is intended to do so, when our minds are focused on pleasing him, and not without our hearts focused likewise. That kind of significant labor has no need of popular validation or praise. The awareness that God sees our labor within his will gives our every effort an abundant meaning. And if this intention has the effect of benefiting our fellow men, then God is pleased all the more.

But there is this additional point as well. If our labor is thwarted, disparaged, or undermined by envious, covetous or mean men, it makes no difference. God sees this also, and singleness of heart under such adverse circumstances only magnifies the significance.

The service of mammon or the service of God - that is the choice of all labor and of every task in the city of man. Whether we are gifted like Mozart, or have dedicated our lives to teaching, or preaching, or healing, or polishing brass, what matters is our intention.

The greatest example given to us is that of our Lord's own mother. As a young virgin, it was her intention humbly to accept the calling in which she found herself. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." Now ask yourself, how significant was that?

**The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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