

INTEGRATED STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE MYSTERY OF WORK*

1ST INTRODUCTORY MEETING

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK AND COURSE OF STUDY

“Let us love God, my friends, let us love God, but let it be through the work of our hands, let it be by the sweat of our brow.” –St. Vincent de Paul

*The chief enemy of life in God is a profusion of worldly cares.
This profusion of cares impels a man into an endless round of secular activities.
Every day, from morning till night, it drives him from one job to another,
not giving him a moment’s rest, leaving him no time
to turn to God and to remain for a while uplifted in prayer to Him.
--Theophan The Recluse*

At this first meeting, the Discussion Leader will introduce you to the general theme regarding work and God’s desire to be involved in our daily occupations, whatever our daily activities may consist of. The leader will distribute the book and familiarize you with its organization.

As the Leader will explain, subsequent meetings will focus on four ways of working. By “working” here is meant any activity at all (i.e. not just gainful activity). These ways of working represent both the right and wrong ways of going about our daily tasks. Each of these ways of working is exemplified by four different “Individuals” described in the Introduction to this book. . One such Individual will be discussed each week, along with relevant readings from the book.

A Study Guide will be provided at each session with suggestions for readings, reflections and discussion topics preparatory to the next session.

You are urged to keep a private journal in which to record your answers to questions posed in the Guide, and to otherwise record your personal reactions and questions and difficulties.

THE FOLLOWING REFLECTIONS IDENTIFY THE THEME OF THIS BOOK AND MAY SERVE FOR USEFUL DISCUSSION IN THIS FIRST SESSION

- *We need to be more and do less. Alas, the culture of the West, especially in North America, defines a person by their output, not by their input, that is the interior life. And this is what we need to focus on more and more as followers of Jesus: cultivating a life in God. It is from this interior walk with Him in which we slow down, recognize His presence, and do everything in and with Him, that our efforts begin to bear supernatural fruit. . . In fact, when living in the present moment like this, I have often found that time has slowed down and even multiplied!*

--Mark Mallett

- *“I have never heard Him speak, but I know that He is within me. He guides and inspires me every moment of the day. Just when I need it, a new light shines on my problems. This happens not so much during my hours of prayer as when I’m busy with my daily work.”* ---St. Therese, the Little Flower

- *For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”. . . . Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.*
--*Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II Document

- *“Rising in the morning, stand as firmly as possible before God in your heart, as you offer your morning prayers; and then go to the work apportioned to you by God, without withdrawing from Him in your feelings and consciousness. In this way you will do your work with the powers of your soul and body, but in your mind and heart you will remain with God.”* --Theophan The Recluse

- *“In Him we live and move and have our being.”* --Acts 17:28

- *“If the creature had to give Us only what is spiritual, he could give Us very little. But in giving us also his little natural acts, he can keep giving them to Us always, and We are in a continuous relationship. The union between Us and the creature is never broken. All the more so, for the smallest things are always at one’s fingertips, within reach of the little and the great, the uneducated and the learned. . . . Breathing, moving, attending to one’s personal needs is proper to everyone, and these things never cease. If they are done to love Me, to let the life of the Divine Will be formed in them, this is Our triumph, Our victory and the purpose for which We created them.”*
--Revelation of Jesus to the Italian mystic and Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta

- *“My daughter, how sorry I feel in seeing the soul huddled within herself—in seeing her operating by herself. I am close to her and look at her, and seeing that many times she is unable to do well what she does, I wait for her to call Me and say: ‘I want to do this thing, but I am unable do it. Come and do it together with me, and I will do everything well.’ For example: ‘I want to love; come to love together with me. I want to pray; come and pray together with me. I want to make this sacrifice; come and give me your strength, for I feel weak...’, and so with everything else. Gladly and with greatest delight, I would offer Myself for everything. I am like the teacher who, having assigned an essay to his pupil, remains close to his student to see what he does. Unable to do well, the pupil becomes worried, worked up, upset, and he may even cry, but he does not say: ‘Master, teach me how I should do this.’ What is not the mortification of the*

teacher, in seeing himself treated like a nothing by his student? Such is my condition.”

--Revelation of Jesus to the Italian mystic
and Servant of God Luisa Piccarretta

- *“It is quite evident that the faithful absolutely need the help of the Divine Redeemer, since He himself said, “Without Me you can do nothing.” Still, it is necessary to state, astonishing as this may seem, our Lord needs the help of his members. This is not due though to any poverty or weakness on his part, but rather because He himself has disposed it thus for the greater honor of his Spotless Spouse.”*

--Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*

- *Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. Hence work is a duty: “If any one will not work, let him not eat.” (2 Thess 3:10) Work honors the Creator’s gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification, and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ.*

-- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 2427

At the end of this first meeting, you will be given a *Study Guide* with suggesting readings, reflections and discussion topics for the next session.



STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE MYSTERY OF WORK*

2ND MEETING

MEDITATION AND READINGS REGARDING THE FIRST INDIVIDUAL

TOPICS FOR MEDITATION

- 1) Read and meditate on the instruction given by Mary to Consuelo (IV, 103, p. 192).
What are the good effects of work done in union with God that Our Lady outlines here?

All of our acts are purposeful according to Mary's instruction:

- Work rises up to God like fragrant incense (a means of praise)
- Work and sufferings [of work] are expiation for sin (ours and others)
- Work done well and in the presence of God brings grace with it
- Work is a source and an efficacious means of sanctification
- Work is a source of spiritual richness (growth in holiness)

- 2) Read and meditate on the Gospel story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42).
What lessons can we draw about how to work from this scripture passage?

The Martha/Mary Story

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and anxious about many things.”

- Jesus was not criticizing Martha for wanting to be a good hostess and doing all the things that hospitality entails. Rather, He was criticizing *the way* she was approaching the “many things.”
- Jesus counsels us to do the many tasks of Martha but with the spirit and attitude of Mary, who kept her gaze fixed on Jesus with love.

Archbishop Luis Martinez (in his book, *The Secrets of the Interior Life*, p. 88)
offers an example of how this works in real life. He writes:

- The life of an artist is to contemplate and reproduce beauty.
- The artist can do other things as well, (cook dinner, take vacations, etc.) but always goes back to his/her chief preoccupation. Everything else for the artist is secondary.
- Like the artist, as we journey through life we have to do many things. But they are all secondary to our proper activity in life: to know, love, and serve God in the midst of our occupations.

- 3) Read and meditate on the Gospel story of The Storm at Sea: (Mark 4:35-41 / Matt 8:18; 23-27 / Luke 8:22-25)

Why did Jesus chastise the apostles in this incident?

- The apostles totally depended on their skills as fishermen before they realized they were over their heads. They turned to Jesus as a last resort. Like them,

how many times do we say: “The only thing we can do now is pray.” Prayer is not the *last* resort. It should be our *first* resort.

- Prayer requires confidence, trust that God will respond. When the apostles finally turned to Jesus for help, they seemed to express doubt that even He could do anything more than simply anguish with them. They finally woke him and said to him, “Teacher, does it not matter to you that we are going to drown?”
- Archbishop Anthony Bloom, in his book, *Beginning To Pray*, says that this story teaches us to bring to God all that is around us, all that is storm, and take refuge in the center of His being, where calm prevails (like being in the eye of the hurricane). If we do so, the storm may still whirl around us, but we would remain at peace where God is, at the only point of total stability.

READINGS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1) One of the characteristics of the First Individual is that he “has next-to-no misgivings about his ideas and impulses.” Why should we be cautious about our first impulses?

The following passages warn about first impulses:

- V, 3, p. 198: Our Lady to Venerable Mary of Agreda
“It is evident that men do not act according to right reason, but according to the impulse of passions, excited by the senses and their objects. . . .”
- IV, 105, p. 194-5: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“. . . at the first unrepressed impulses the passions will break forth.”
- IV, 78, p. 182: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“the smoke of their passions, which greatly blind them.”
- I, 18, p. 33: Thomas Fahy
“Blessed Dina Belanger remarked that the first impulse of nature was usually the wrong thing to do. She would take a moment to reflect and try to follow the impulse of grace.”
- III, 64, p. 115: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“A twisted thread in the creature’s works is enough to disorder the creature and the works that go forth from him, darkening the Divine Science that his works contain.”
- IV, 93, p. 189: Diarist
“Rubinstein hesitated in order to allow a purer impulse to arise and play the note.”
- IV, 92, p. 188-9: Our Lady to Venerable Mary of Agreda
“Whenever thou must perform any . . . work, consider beforehand whether what

thou art going to say or do corresponds with the doings of the Lord. . . .

- IV, 43, p. 163: *The Imitation of Christ*
“It is a mark of great wisdom neither to be hasty in our actions nor stubbornly maintain our private opinions. . . . Seek counsel . . . ask instruction . . . do not follow your own devices.”

2) One of the characteristics of the First Individual is that he “sees and hears very little outside his own mind.” He won’t “submit his mind to the matter at hand and let the matter itself suggest the way to proceed.” How might we submit our minds to the matter and allow the matter to suggest the way to proceed? That is to say, if we turn away from first impulses, if we turn away from our own thoughts, then we must turn toward something else. What should that be?

The following passages encourage us to turn away from our first impulse to allow for the impulse of grace.

- I, 14, p. 32: Theophan the Recluse counsels us to pray thus:
“Do Thou perform within me what is pleasing to Thy Will.”
- II, 19, p. 57: Theophan the Recluse
“When undertaking an endeavor, do not concentrate your attention and heart on it, but look upon it as something secondary. . . . If we are self-satisfied and contented with our efforts, it is a sign that they are not performed in the right way, or that we lack wisdom.”
- II, 21, p. 58: Sister Maria Consolata
“The soul should avoid proceeding according to her own whims and preferences; instead she should comply with the workings of Jesus in the soul with simplicity and docility.”
- II, 22, p. 58: Sister Maria Consolata
“Let Jesus do it!”
“Why not submit to Him one’s own opinions, one’s thoughts, aspirations, desires, preoccupations? Why not adapt oneself trustingly at each moment to His actions which alone are always sanctifying?”
- II, 23, p. 59: Sister Maria Consolata
“I will do everything, but you must let Me do it!”
- II, 28, p. 61: Diarist
“We exhibit right attention when we listen to Christ more than to our own thoughts when wondering what to do in a given circumstance.”
- III, 80: A Servant of God
“. . . it is not that we do nothing—rather, we do everything in our power to allow God to act in us as we give up our thoughts and ideas.”

- IV, 61, P. 174: Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa
“I have renounced deciding for myself and I have given God the chance to intervene in my life, if he so wishes.”
- IV, 72, p. 179: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Always have Me present to work with you and it will be completed with perfection.”
- I, 11, p. 29: Diarist
On creativity (the artist) and inspiration (the iconographer)

3) The First Individual is self-affirming, slow to be self-critical and see what is wrong, quick to see what is right, produces half-finished work. Does the description of the First Individual shine a light on your own way of working? How? Why do you think we all work like the First Individual at times?



STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE MYSTERY OF WORK*

3RD MEETING

MEDITATION AND READINGS REGARDING THE SECOND INDIVIDUAL

“We shall say no more ‘Our god’ to the work of our hands.” (Hosea 14:4)

*“Teach us to care and not to care,
Teach us to sit still.”
(T.S. Eliot, “Ash Wednesday”)*

*“I will all the more boast of my weakness,
that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (II Corinthians 12:9)*

TOPICS FOR MEDITATION

Meditate on the Gospel story of The Great Catch of Fish (*Luke 5:1-11*). Journal-write about the lessons you draw from this Scripture passage. Read the commentary on this passage in the book (III, 67, page 117).

- God likes to create situations where there is no doubt where the effect is coming from.
“Master, we have been hard at it all night long and have caught nothing; but if you say so, I will lower the nets. Upon doing this they caught such a great number of fish that their nets were at a breaking point.” (Luke 5:5-6)
“For indeed, amazement at the catch they had made seized him and all his shipmates.” (Luke 5:9)
- “Their boat was empty, a necessary condition for the miracle that is to follow, for first we must know that our own efforts have achieved us nothing. Then Jesus gets into Peter’s boat and everything changes.” - *Diarist, p. 117*

Read the passage on page 130, III, 90. It is a reflection on Scripture stories of barren women whose very helplessness is used by the Lord to accomplish extraordinary things.

- Genesis 18:1-15 and 21:1-7: Sara gives birth to Isaac
“Is anything too marvelous for the Lord to do?” (The stranger in Genesis 18:14)
- Judges 13:2-25: Manoah’s wife gives birth to Samson
Manoah offered the kid and the cereal offering “to the Lord, whose works are mysterious.” (Judges 13:19)
- 1 Samuel 1:1-28 and 2:1-10: Hannah gives birth to Samuel
*“There is no Holy One like the Lord; there is no Rock like our god.”
(Hannah’s song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:2)*
- Luke 1:5-58: Elizabeth gives birth to John and Mary gives birth to Jesus

- *“In these days the Lord is acting on my behalf. . . “ (Elizabeth in Luke 1:25)*
- *“For nothing is impossible with God.” (Angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:370)*
- *“God who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” (Mary’s Magnificat in Luke 1:49)*

READINGS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The Second Individual works in an admirable way, a way we would all hope to imitate. He is humble and wise; he has the virtue of objectivity and thus his work has a rightness about it. He works very well both in manner and in output, yet all the work is done without reference to God. The “one thing necessary” is missing—working for, with, and in the Lord.

1) How do we know that God wants to be involved in all that we do, that He desires us to work for, with, and in Him? To answer, consider the following:

- IV, 72, p. 179: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Ask my assistance at the start of everything you undertake. Always have Me present to work with you and it will be completed with perfection.”
- IV, 74, P. 180: Sr. Mary of the Trinity
“Yes, your work is a joy and a great dignity for man; but what I desire is not merely your work, but yourself. You dishonor Me when you leave Me to think only of your work.”
- IV, 79, p. 182: Jesus to Luisa
“I want your work to be honest. You must keep one eye on Me, and the other on what you are doing.”
- IV, 77, p. 182: Our Lady to Luisa Piccarreta
“You must know that what does not begin with Jesus, who is within the heart, even though they be the most beautiful external works, can never please Me, because they are void of the Life of my dear Son.”
- IV, 99, p. 191: St. John of the Cross
“The pure and whole work done for God in a pure heart merits a whole kingdom for its owner.”
- IV, 16, p. 151: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Act with an upright intention of pleasing God alone.”

2) It’s fairly easy to recognize the need to be like the Second Individual, to recognize that we should be more open to criticism, less impulsive, more craftsmanlike. We all recognize the rightness of our working in a better way. Yet, it’s harder to relate to the

notion that we should invite God into everything that we do, that He should be a part of what we do when we fry an egg or fill out a check, or criticize a subordinate (including our child). Why is it so hard? Why do we find it difficult to avoid the spiritual shortcomings of the Second Individual, that is, why is it so hard to consciously involve God in our work? What are the obstacles that stand in the way of this good? To answer, consider the following passages:

Trusting in our own powers, not trusting in God's.

- IV, 91, p. 188: Theophan the Recluse
“The greatest danger lies in the soul thinking that it can find this help within itself; then it will lose everything.”
- III, 54, p. 110: Jeremiah 1:4-10
“Say not, ‘I am too young.’”
- III, 55, p. 111: *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena
“But the soul who perfectly hopes in me and serves me with her whole heart and will must necessarily put no hope in herself or in the world or in her own weakness.”
- IV, 58, p. 172: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10
“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Distraction

- IV, 96, p. 190: Jesus to Sr. Mary of the Trinity
“You think too much about your lace and you neglect Me.”
- IV, 67, p. 176: Theophan The Recluse
“You tell me you are subject to distraction.”
- VI, 9, p. 215: Schema Monk Agapii
“Freedom from distraction is not given to the mind quickly. What is needed is a humble heart, the grace of Christ, and constant effort.”
- VI, 10, p. 215: Schema Monk Agapii
“When outward surroundings make prayer difficult, or when you have no time to pray . . . strive to preserve the spirit of prayer in yourself. . . .”

Egoism

- II, 19, p. 57: Theophan The Recluse
“If we are self-satisfied and contented with our efforts, it is a sign that they are not performed in the right way, or that we lack wisdom.”
- III, 63, p. 115: The Tower of Babel
“The building of the Tower of Babel was the work of pride. . . . They thought not of God, they sought only their own glory.”

- IV, 50, p. 166: Ste. Therese of Lisieux
“Now I can say that I am no more attached to my own ideas or feelings.”

Lack of Will

- IV, 12, p. 150: Jesus to Luisa
“Oh, how immense is the wealth that creatures could acquire working this way, but it does not interest them!”
- IV, 17, p. 151: Our Lord to Maureen Sweeney-Kyle
“Self-will smudges the mirror of the soul.”

Lack of self-knowledge:

- II, 29, p. 62: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“The greatest favor that I can grant to a soul is to make it know itself. The knowledge of oneself and the knowledge of God go hand in hand. In so far as you shall know yourself, so shall you know God.”
- III, 61, p. 114: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“This nobility will prevail in you if, from time to time, you will try to enter into your nothingness; that is to say, if you will attain perfect knowledge of yourself.”
- II, 40, p. 67: Diarist
“The Father told St. Catherine in The Dialogue that the spiritual life is perfected in the cell of self-knowledge.”
- II, 36, p. 66: St. John of the Cross
“God desires the smallest degree of purity of conscience in you more than all the works you can perform.”
- III, 91, p. 132: From *The Dialogue*
“To give them opportunity for merit, to keep them in the self-knowledge whence they drew true humility, to make them compassionate instead of cruel toward their neighbors so that they will sympathize with them in their labors.
- VI, 20, p. 220: Schema Monk Agapii
“Then a kind of inner light illumines all that is within him, and whatever he does, says, or thinks, is performed with full awareness and attention. He is able to discern clearly the nature of the thoughts, intentions, and desires that come to him; . . .”
- VI, 6, p. 212: Archbishop Anthony Bloom
“One of the spiritual writers, Theophan The Recluse, says: ‘Most people are like a shaving of wood which is curled round its central emptiness.’ If we are really honest, we must admit that this is a very apt description of the state of practically all of us.”

Ignorance (False Conscience)

- It would be wrong to appropriate the understanding of this doctrine of work in a Pelagian way, i.e., thinking that this is another thing we have to do to please God. No! God wants to give this to us as we cooperate with His grace.
- We think we have to be our own strength, but God wants to be our strength as we surrender “the imaginary and minute amount of disturbing strength we have,” as Archbishop Bloom says. (*Beginning to Pray*, p. 178)

Prevenient and Actual Acts

- Read and meditate on the brief write-up concerning prevenient and actual acts, found in Appendix B of this Guide

“Surrender to God and He will do everything for you.”
- Antiphon, Office of Readings



STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE MYSTERY OF WORK*

4TH MEETING

MEDITATION AND READINGS REGARDING THE THIRD INDIVIDUAL

*“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is vain that you rise up early and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.”*
- Psalm 127: 1-2

*“Whatever you do in word or in deed
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*
- Colossians 3:17

*“It is God who, for his own generous purposes,
Gives you the intention and the power to act.”*
- Philippians 2:12

Topics for Meditation

Read the Gospel story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21). Journal write your thoughts about how Jesus can bring a hundredfold out of our insufficiency.

Feeding the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, “This is a deserted place and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages. (This was the disciples’ idea of how to solve a problem.)

Jesus said to them, “There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.” (The apostles are now faced with what seems to be an impossible task. Once again their human reasoning falls short of what Jesus wants.)

But they said to him, “Five loaves and two fish are all we have here.”

Then he said, “Bring them here to me,” (If we bring our insufficiency to the Lord, He can work with it and make it sufficient, or even as in this case, superabundant!) and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, (Jesus does what we ought to always do—look up to heaven) he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over—twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

(This gospel shows us that when God is brought into a work, there is always more than enough, more than expected or needed. Our insufficiency invites his abundance.)

READINGS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1) How do we know that God *desires* to be involved in all that we do?

To answer, consider the following passages:

- III, 100, p. 140: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Behold, I am the God who is isolated from creatures.”
“I am the life of each one of their acts, yet they consider Me to be irrelevant.”
- IV, 12, p. 150: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Always work together with Me—as if we were together doing the same thing.”
- IV, 16, p. 151: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Act with the upright intention of pleasing God alone.”
- VI, 24, p. 223: Sister Mary of the Trinity
“Ask all of Me every day, every morning what is necessary for the day.”
- IV, 72, p. 179: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Always have Me present to work with you and it will be completed with perfection.”
- III, 68, p. 118: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“I want you to remain near Me—like an Infant—to always ask for my help and assistance, acknowledging your nothingness and expecting everything from Me.”

2) The Third Individual (read pages 9-12 in the Introduction) works for and with the Lord. This merger between work and prayer has been a monastic ideal for centuries. How can we reconcile our focus on what we are doing with our awareness of the presence of God? Do the two seem diametrically opposed to each other? For answers, consider the following:

- IV, 56, p. 170: Tony Hendra
“Laborare est orare *doesn't* mean we actually mumble prayers while we work. . . . The work itself is prayer.”
- III, 48, p. 108: Theophan The Recluse
“What you should do is . . . busy yourself with worldly affairs, but think of them as a commission from the Lord, as something done in His presence.”
- IV, 67, p. 176: Theophan the Recluse

“Act and speak always with the awareness that the Lord is near and directs everything according to his pleasure.”

- IV, 82, p. 184: Brother Lawrence
“Nothing is more pleasing to God than to turn away from all creatures many times throughout the day to withdraw and adore him present within.”

3) How can we begin to convert all of our acts into acts pleasing to God instead of acts pleasing to ourselves (that is, works that satisfy our own egos)? How can we begin performing all our acts for, with, and in God? To answer, consider the following:

- I, 13, p. 31: Pope Benedict XVI
“God speaks quietly. But He gives us all kinds of signs.”
- IV, 61, p. 174: Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa
“I will first ask him, by the simple means of prayer . . . whether it is his will that I make that journey, do that job, pay that visit, buy that object, and then I will act or not.”
- VI, 11, p. 216: G. K. Chesterton
“I say grace before the concert and the opera, . . . and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.”
- IV, 71, p. 178: St. Faustina Kowalska
“Jesus, bless this pen so that everything You order me to write may be for the glory of God.”
- VI, 5, p. 212: Pope Leo XIII
“[St. Thomas Aquinas] . . . never began to read or to write without seeking for God’s help by prayer. . . . All his learning had come to him not so much from his own study and toil, as immediately from God.”
- VI, 23, p. 222: Diarist
“The essence of recollection is to do nothing without an interior listening to see if it is right or wrong to do this thing.”
- VI, 18, p. 219: Diarist
“This is how work becomes prayer . . . by how we listen with our interior ears, to what He might be saying to us in and through the task at hand.”
- II, 28, p. 61: Diarist
“We exhibit right intention when we listen to Christ more than to our own thoughts when wondering what to do in a given circumstance.”
- III, 43, p. 105: Theophan the Recluse
Remember the Lord as you work.
- IV, 51, p. 166: Theophan the Recluse:

“Go to the work apportioned to you by God, without withdrawing from Him in your feelings and consciousness.”

*“Let the favor of the Lord be upon us;
Give success to the work of our hands,
give success to the work of our hands.”
- Psalm 89 (90)*



STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE MYSTERY OF WORK*

5TH MEETING

MEDITATION AND READINGS REGARDING THE FOURTH INDIVIDUAL

*Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine,
so neither can you unless you remain in me.” (John 15:4)*

*“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will
bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”(John 15:5)*

TOPICS FOR MEDITATION

Peter Walks on Water (Matthew 14:22-30)

How is the experience of Peter walking on water akin to the experience of the Fourth Individual?

After he had fed the people, Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and precede him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone.

Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified.

“It is a ghost,” they said, and they cried out in fear.

At once Jesus spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Peter said to him in reply, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

He said, “Come.”

Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus.

But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter, and said to him, “O, you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

After they got into the boat, the wind died down

Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”

Commentary:

As long as he kept his focus on Jesus, Peter did what a human being, of himself, cannot do! When Jesus got into the boat with them, the storm calmed down. In the Gospel of John’s account of the disciples seeing Jesus walking on water during a great storm, we read: “They were glad to take him into the boat and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.” (Jn 6:21). No more battling with wind and waves—in fact, even no more rowing! God Himself did the work for them!

Anne Sullivan, the tutor who led Helen Keller out of her world of darkness and silence, seemingly “walked on water.” She did what no other person had been able to do for Helen. Read the passage (I, 19. p. 33f) about her struggle and eventual success and journal-write your response to her experience. Are there any parallels in your own experience?

READINGS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1) How does the Fourth Individual epitomize the promise Jesus made at the Last Supper when He spoke these words? *“In those days you will know that I am in the Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). To answer, consider the following.*

- IV, 49, p. 166: The Little Flower:
“I believe quite simply that it is Jesus Himself, hidden deep in my poor little heart, who works within me in a mysterious manner and inspires all my daily actions.”
- II, 21, p. 58: Sr. Maria Consolata
“Allow me to do it!”
- II, 22, p. 58: Sr. Maria Consolata
“Let Jesus do it!”
- II, 23, p. 59: Sr. Maria Consolata
“Allow Me to do it all! I will do everything; but you should, at every moment, give Me what I ask for with much love!”
- III, 18, p. 91: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Always work together with Me—as if we were together doing the same thing.”
- IV, 79, p. 182: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Do not look to see if the task is painful or disgusting, easy or difficult. You shall close your eyes to all that, and you shall open them to Me, knowing that I am in you to oversee your work.”
- IV, 34, p. 160: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“There will be no ‘I shall do,’ and ‘You shall do.’ These shall disappear and be replaced by ‘we’ will do. Everything will be ‘ours.’”
- IV, 73, p. 179: Archbishop Martinez
“I feel that [Jesus] is the source of all my activity. . . . Jesus does my work, and I do the work of Jesus!”
- IV, 59, p. 172: Blessed Dina Bélanger

“It is so manifestly his work that often I hardly know what I am writing. I am impelled by a gentle and superior force.”

- III, 53, p. 110: Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta
“Your life and Ours must be as one.”
- III, 15, 90: A Servant of God
“Allow Me to act in you, to live in you.”
- III, 36, p. 101: Jesus to Luisa
“Do not do a single act that does not go through Me.”

2) What is it that we need to do in order to pass from the state of the Third Individual to the Fourth? For answers, consider the following passages:

- II, 53, p. 75: Pope Benedict XVI
“The ultimate thing, this decisive thing, is the primacy of God. The germ of all temptation is setting God aside, so that He seems to be a secondary concern when compared with all the urgent priorities of our lives.”
- II, 52, p. 74: A Servant of God
“Use the mind I have given you to understand Me always more. This is how you will love Me more . . .”
- II, 31, p. 63: A Servant of God
“You must pray and work, therefore, to rectify your reason—in order to love. You must understand that as your understanding becomes more pure, so does your love!”
- II, 50, p. 73: *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena
“Each of you will be rewarded according to the measure of your love, not according to your work or the time spent.”
- III, 50, p. 108: Jesus to Luisa
“I did much and suffered much, but my sole purpose in all of that was Love of my Father and of man.”
- VI, 8, p. 215: *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena
Everything you do can be a prayer.
- II, 20, p. 57: Sr. Maria Consolata
“The act of love ought to be so unceasing that no one act would be willingly lost throughout the day. . . .”
- III, 31, p. 99: St. Maria Faustina Kowalska
“All works are nothing more than a tiny drop before Him. It is love that has meaning and power and merit.”
- IV, 98, p. 191: Jesus to Sr. Mary of the Trinity

“Your works please Me in the measure in which they express your love.”

- IV, 75, p. 180: Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O.
“In proportion to the intensity of my love for God, my supernatural life may increase at every moment by a new infusion of the grace of the active presence of Jesus in me, . . .”

3) The Fourth Individual differs from the others in the most profound and fundamental way. How would you describe the difference? For answers, consider the following passages. Also consult the Introduction, pages 12-13.

- IV, 40, p. 162: St. Catherine of Genoa
“If a work is to be perfect it must be wrought in us not chiefly by us, for God’s works must be done by Him and not wrought chiefly by man.”
- I, 36, p. 45: Dom Chautard, OSB
“My outward acts become the manifestation of this life of Jesus in me. . . . ‘I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.’”
- VI, 29, p. 225: Dom Chautard, OSB
“He who prays is in touch with the FIRST cause. He acts directly upon it. And by that very fact h has his hand upon all the secondary causes.”
- III, 92, p. 133: Fr. Raphael Simon, OCSO
“What have you that you have not received? . . . Our good actions have God as their first cause, and our ability to perform them is also from God.”
- III, 98, p. 137: Diarist (paragraph 5)
“The harmonious connection between God as Primary Cause and we as his secondary causes . . . is restored in the measure . . . that we allow Christ to live and act in us.”
- IV, 41, p. 162: Hugh Owen on Blessed Dina Bélanger
“Jesus invites us to unite our acts to his always and everywhere with a new and deeper understanding of what we are doing.”
- III, 62, p. 114: Hugh Owen on Blessed Dina Bélanger
“It is possible for souls of good will to participate fully in the divine-human acts of Jesus and Mary and to allow the Divine Will to reign in all of their thoughts, words, and actions during their lives on earth.”

“If you move, if you breathe, if you work, if you eat, if you sleep—all of this you must do as if you were doing it in My humanity, as if all of your work came out of Me.”
(Jesus to Luisa Piccarreta)



STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE MYSTERY OF WORK*

SIXTH (LAST) MEETING

MEDITATION AND READINGS

In this last meeting, you are urged to reflect on the lessons learned from the meditations, readings and discussions over the past weeks. The doctrine of work revealed in the readings may very likely have struck you as new and unfamiliar. And perhaps rather difficult to grasp in a practical way. If you are moved to share your thoughts, you will be invited to express what you have learned from the readings and discussions, and/or what you still have difficulty understanding or even accepting.

READINGS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

For this last session, it is recommended you read *An Unlikely Story* (pp. 249-271). This story illustrates in a very practical way much of the teaching of this book. The story is a true account of an improbable business venture undertaken in the spirit of the Psalmist's bold declaration: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." (Ps 127:1).

You are also urged to read more freely in the book if you wish, and in any case to select one or two passages which has particularly struck you. Be prepared to read the passage aloud (or parts of it if it is rather long), and to share what it meant to you.

For those interested in more extensive reading in the writings represented in *The Mystery of Work* may find reference to their works in the book's bibliography.

Thank you for participating in this study. It is hoped that in the future you will continue to avail yourself of the reflections by the saints, popes, and religious writers recorded in this book. Pray to understand (and give yourself time to understand) what these voices are trying to convey regarding God's loving desire to be in your life in all its ordinariness.



APPENDIX A

PREVENIENT AND ACTUAL ACTS

- Jesus taught the mystic Luisa Piccarreta the importance of uniting all the acts of our day with the Divine Will. He spoke of the Prevenient Act (that which precedes all the others), and the Actual Act (that which is made at the outset of various activities). What follows is a kind of summary of what Jesus taught her.
- The Prevenient Act should be made by the soul upon awakening in the morning, setting one's will in His, and telling Him with firm conviction that the soul wants to live and act only in the Divine Will. One would do well to make this traditional morning offering:

Morning Offering

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day, for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, in reparation for sin, for the intentions of all my friends and associates, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father.

- Jesus also made Luisa understand that the purity of the intention of the Prevenient Act can be sullied, clouded, eclipsed by acts of self-esteem, self-will, carelessness, neglect, etc. He explained that by inviting the Divine Will into what we are presently doing (that is, my making an Actual Act), the soul clears away any clouds or dust that may have sullied the brightness of the Prevenient Act.
- Jesus concluded his instruction to Luisa by affirming that Prevenient Act and Actual Acts are both necessary. He let her understand that the Prevenient Act assists and makes room for the Actual Acts that we do throughout the day and provides the proper disposition for the Actual Act. He told Luisa that the Actual Act preserves the Prevenient Act and enhances the disposition that accompanies it.
- How do we make these Actual Acts? Just by inviting Him to enter, each of us in his or her own way. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. All we have to do is hear Him knocking and open up to Him, yes, inviting him into the very ordinary activities we are engaged in. He wishes to be engaged in them with us, to guide us, so that all that we do may be for the Father's honor and glory, just as was the case in all that He did, in his hidden private life no less than in his public ministry.



Appendix B

To Live by Faith
by Fr. Dominic Rover, O.P.

SOME THOUGHTS TO GUIDE YOUR READING OF THE POEM

- The poet uses several images that reflect St. Paul's statement that "strength is made perfect in weakness." What are the images?
- Do you agree with the poet's take on talking too much and using words to justify our behavior?
- In what way is a life of faith akin to a high dive?

To Live by Faith

To live by faith
is to live peacefully, prayerfully,
hopefully, hopelessly, outside myself.
At peace with myself
yet outside myself.
Not leaning on myself, old rubber-legs,
but leaning on God Who stands up straight
and begs us, almost, to lean on Him,
God with His daily gift
of hard rocks and white flowers.

To live by faith
is to live outside myself.

To live by faith is to be at home
and yet a stranger in my own house.
It is to be sure about God
yet unsure about everything that is not grounded in God
yet sure about everything
because everything can be grounded in God.

To live by faith
Is to stop justifying myself
to stop frowning
to stop whimpering
like a cropped poodle on Pablum.

To live by faith
Is to stop wondering why things don't turn out right.

To live by faith
is to stop talking – when talk is fear or frenzy
or a giddy cover-up,

when talk is all about
setting things right, my way.
Dear God, to stop talking!

To live by faith is to be silent, to be dumb,
to be led dumb to the shearers,
to be at peace without the silk or the slime of words.

To live by faith
is to be content to be silent
so that He can speak
with the wordless words of the Word.

To live by faith
is to need to be obedient
which is to enter the world of another
as guest and quiet victim
and secret sharer.

To live by faith
is not to be sour about anything
because Jesus is sweet
and His plans for me honey to my mouth,
with bitter seeds in it, yes,
that explode each hour like Contac,
to become—small beads of honey,
each of a different taste.

To live by faith
Is to die to my own thoughts about myself,
to die to any plans
any plans
any plans
I might make for myself

(Lord Jesus, be Lord of me, and let your plans
for me come true before my dreams despoil them!)

To live by faith
Is not so much to leap
as to fall,
not so much to hold fast
as to let go.

To live by faith
is a lovely awkward dive
from a 20-meter board
that always ends, blue splash and all,
in a daring clean-cut entry
into water,

an element not mine
so cold at first,
but easier after awhile
when my warmth, poor little fish,
becomes one with the warmth of the water.

To live by faith is a gold-medal dive
that is all His doing
and yet my dive,
my fall,
my womb-like watery homecoming.