

INDUSTRIOUSNESS, ORDER

1. *Virtue of industriousness*

“Industriousness”, as used here, refers to the virtue proper to those who earnestly and diligently take up their work, for which they may also often have an interest and liking. Industriousness as a virtue is closely connected to diligence, that is, to the readiness to confront and resolve rapidly, without unnecessary delays, the work one is called to undertake.

Industriousness is opposed to idleness, or more exactly to what from ancient times was seen as one of the capital sins, namely, sloth or laziness. Laziness is not to be understood so much as merely “doing nothing” as the attitude that, in the words of St Thomas, “causes sadness concerning some spiritual good because of the bodily effort connected with it.”¹ In a broader sense than what St Thomas immediately intended, we can take the “spiritual good” he mentions here to refer not only to the spiritual life in the strict sense, but more broadly to any truly human good. Industriousness, then, is the attitude of the spirit that leads one to take up and carry out with diligence one’s work and to confront with responsibility and constancy whatever one’s mission or task requires.

The virtuous character of industriousness stems from an obligation binding on all human beings: to contribute to the good of the community. Thus industriousness, as a virtue, does not depend only, or mainly, on the need to support oneself: even if this were guaranteed, this virtue would still not cease to be required. Industriousness is closely tied to justice and solidarity and, in Christian terms, to charity. St Josemaría Escrivá wrote in *The Way: There is no excuse for those who could be scholars and are not.*² And in another place: *The one who can do the work of ten has to do the work of fifteen.*³

Industriousness is a condition for effectiveness. This effectiveness and the fruit it yields as a consequence of work certainly depend on many factors and circumstances, some external to the person, others relating to the qualities each one possesses. But it is also certain that dedication to one’s own task, perseverance in one’s work hour by hour, day by day, allows a person to reach goals that, at first, could have seemed unattainable.

Industriousness, in any case, is an expression of the seriousness with which a person confronts his profession or job and takes up the duties that activity involves. It is an integral element of the professional prestige that, as *The Way* says,⁴ forms part of one’s *bait* as a *fisher of men*, that is, the witness of work that is well done, which wins the appreciation of others and facilitates conversations and relationships to make Christ known to others.

Any consideration of industriousness that undervalues its true importance, or advocates its need or usefulness only as a means to ward off idleness, puts the cart before the horse. Idleness is bad not merely because it is accompanied by a lackadaisical attitude that could weaken one’s spirit and lead to sin, but it is bad in and of itself, since it entails belittling, if not abandoning the mission one has received as a Christian, as well as one’s unshirkable social responsibility. It is true that the biblical

¹ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, 12, q. 84, a. 4.

² ST JOSEMARÍA, *The Way*, 332.

³ ST JOSEMARÍA, *AGP* (General Archives of the Prelature), P10, 266.

⁴ ST JOSEMARÍA, *The Way*, 372.

command to work – especially in the Wisdom books – often takes the condemnation of idleness as its point of departure, but it has a depth of meaning that goes far deeper. In the Old Testament it is related with God’s own creative work,⁵ and in the New Testament with the dignity and seriousness of the Christian vocation.⁶ As St Paul says: *the man of God (should be) complete, equipped for every good work.*⁷ We can also quote St Josemaría here on the need *to make good use of the talents we have each received from God.*⁸

2. Industriousness, activity, and activism

The virtue of industriousness, as we said above, is related to justice, which leads a person to faithfully and responsibly fulfill his or her duties and work assignments. And thus it is also related to fortitude, which impels one to confront difficulties and overcome tiredness and fatigue. An especially important failing here is not making good use of time. St Paul invites us to live *redimentes tempus*, making the most of time.⁹ In another place he writes, *tempus breve est*, time is very short.¹⁰ As St Josemaría says: *Brief indeed is our time for loving, for giving, for making atonement. It would be very wrong, therefore, for us to waste it, or to cast this treasure irresponsibly overboard. We mustn’t squander this period of the world’s history which God has entrusted to each one of us.*¹¹

Industriousness thus entails making good use of time, filling the hours of the day with intense work. While leading us to be responsible in carrying out our work and in overcoming laziness, it does not exclude contemplating beauty, or enjoying playing with others, or other realities that are connatural to human existence, such as rest. Rest will occasionally imply ceasing all activity, as when we sleep; but often it means *turning our attention to other activities that require less effort*, rather than *not doing anything*.¹² These intervals are just as important to life as our work is,¹³ not only because they allow us to recover our strength so that we can return to our work with zest, but also because they contribute to our peace of mind and harmony of spirit.

Industriousness is opposed not only to laziness, but equally to activism, that is, to the anxious search for constant work, giving oneself over to excessive and feverish activity. This could easily deform one’s personality, preventing one from attending to the people around him, making it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to develop the personal qualities each one has received, and could even lead to losing sight of the authentic meaning of life.

Classical philosophy, especially Aristotle, makes clear how different beings are endowed with a nature or principle of activity that defines and characterizes each of them: each being acts according to its nature in such a way that, through its action, it expresses its nature while at the same time bringing it to perfection. Classical philosophy also showed how an action is defined in reference to the end that is sought through that action. It is the end that determines the action and endows it with meaning. An action lacking an end does not make any sense and can be seen as irrational.

Christian thinkers took up and deepened the reflections initiated by Greek philosophy. Biblical revelation presents to us God’s salvific plan, and leads to a vision of the world as a reality unified by the action of God giving existence to all things and directing them towards the goal or final consummation to which he destines them, namely, the fullness of the kingdom of heaven where, as St Paul tells us, *God may be everything to every one.*¹⁴

It is in this context that the Christian virtue of industriousness is situated. Unlike activism, it connotes an authentically spiritual and human value. As Juan Bautista Torellò has written:

⁵ Cf. *Ex* 20:9-11.

⁶ Cf. *2 Thess* 3:6-15 and *Eph* 4:23-26.

⁷ *2 Tim* 3:17.

⁸ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 81.

⁹ *Eph* 5:16.

¹⁰ *1 Cor* 7:29.

¹¹ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 39.

¹² ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 62.

¹³ Cf. ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 10.

¹⁴ *1 Cor* 15:28.

“Industriousness is either service or it is mere slavery.” Human work is called to yield fruit, as the Parable of the Talents¹⁵ shows us; but also, and inseparably, it is called to perfect the subject who carries it out: the human person is not a slave, but the master of work, and it is in work that each one should grow and mature as a spiritual being, as a person. The diligent and responsible dedication to one’s own task should go hand in hand with serenity, with the capacity to perceive the good and the beautiful, with openness to those around us for whose good we are working, and above all, to the reality of God, before whose eyes our work takes place.

To summarize, the virtue of industriousness inclines us to work, and to work hard, to be dedicated and exacting, without rushing or allowing our work to dominate us. On the contrary, it enables us to tackle our work calmly and attentively, and thus to take care of the small details, with a spirit of service and an awareness of God’s presence, to whom our work, like all reality, should be referred. *A hardworking person*, St Josemaria wrote, *does as he ought, and concentrates on what he is doing, not out of routine nor to while away the passing hours, but as a result of attentive and pondered reflection This is what makes a man diligent.* And he added, *Our everyday usage of this word ‘diligent’ already gives us some idea of its Latin origin. ‘Diligent’ comes from the word ‘diligo’, which means to love, to appreciate, to choose something after careful consideration and attention. The diligent man does not rush into things. He does his work thoroughly and lovingly.*¹⁶

3. Industriousness and order

Activism, in the final analysis, is an attitude that leaves us prey to whatever is going on around us, failing to master the situation, and leads to acting hastily, with disorder and ineffectiveness. Industriousness, in contrast, brings with it serenity and the ability to master the train of events around us, and hence to being ordered. And with order comes effectiveness – not the apparent effectiveness resulting from activism, but authentic and enduring effectiveness.

The Greek language has two words that are phonetically similar, but semantically different: *cosmos*, which signifies order, and *caos*, which in the original Hellenic idiom had a meaning that is still preserved in several modern languages: confusion, disorder. The play between these two terms in Greek thought led to viewing the universe (which was designated precisely by the substantive *cosmos*) as a reality marked by order. Though not excluding chance and the unforeseen, the cosmos obeys laws that can be grasped and analyzed by the human intelligence, thus giving origin to the different sciences, and with them, to the possibility of an ever greater dominion over nature.

The word “order” can take on more immediate uses, which might be called “anthropological.” It can be used to designate the way we position the objects that make up our world so as to render them pleasing and harmonious; or for the things we use, so that by putting each in the right place, we can easily find and make use of them. And, with a more direct reference to the virtue of industriousness, it can be used for the organization of the means and time available so as to attain effectively the end one is seeking.

Although order has obvious material implications, its root lies in the spirit. It is the result of a reflection that begins from a consideration of the end and goes on to consider the most apt and appropriate means to be adopted, either in general, or in some specific moment. In the latter case, prudence will play the decisive role, counting on the means here and now at hand. As a result of this consideration of the means, order leads a Christian to arrange his day in such a way that his work and norms of piety, the duties of his state in life and apostolic assignments, dedication to his family and dealings with friends and colleagues will all find their place, so that none of these realities is neglected. Thus a person comes to experience in his own life what one of the points of *The Way* tells us: *With order your time will be multiplied, and you will be able to give more glory to God by doing more work in his service.*¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. Mt 25:14-28.

¹⁶ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 81

¹⁷ ST JOSEMARÍA, *The Way*, 80.

Order thus is an expression of a serene and harmonious spirit that entails an adequate hierarchy in our goals, values and efforts. Hence the invitation often found in ascetical writers to live in an ordered way is much more than a mere call to order the things that we possess or use, or to avoid precipitation. It is, above all, an invitation to structure our inner life properly, centring our heart on the guiding principle of love for God and others, in such a way that our actions, informed by an adequate hierarchy of values, are oriented to love and service, and truly and effectively contribute to the good of those around us and of the entire society.

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