

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

June 12, 2011 at 9:22am

Why work?

by Joan Chittister

Prayer and contemplation,
Benedict is clear,
are no substitute for work.
Nor are they an excuse
to detach ourselves
from the holy act of human responsibility
for making the world go round.

The truth is that work has
a spiritual function.
It is done for the sake of the soul,
not for the punishment of the body
or for the gratification of the ego.
Good work is meant to build into us
a respect for the order and beauty
that the cultivation of the spiritual life
demands.

Good work is a human being's
contribution to the development
of humankind
and the fulfillment of the universe.

In fact, why we work
is the very bedrock of Benedictine spirituality.

It is about the bringing
of the Reign of God on earth.

It is about
completing the work of God
in the upbuilding of the world.

Whatever the Benedictine does--
mop the floor, weed the garden, fold the clothes,
write the reports, plan the programs, produce the goods--
becomes an act of human liturgy
in praise of
what it is to be alive,
to redeem creation from chaos
and our souls from apathy.

Work that participates in a common project of humanity
frees us from total self-centeredness
and makes us a prouder, more fulfilled part
of the human race.

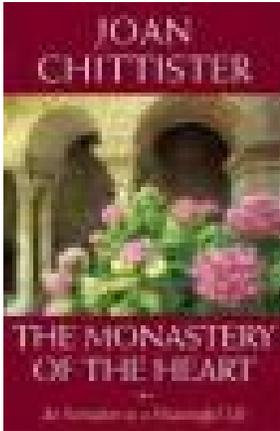
Work, in Benedictine spirituality,
calls for labor--
manual labor,
spiritual labor,
and intellectual labor--
that continues the co-creation
of the world.

In the end, they are all part
of the same condition,
the same scriptural mandate
"to till the garden and keep it"
that is at the heart of Benedictine life.

It is all to be good work,
in the tradition
of the great Benedictine monasteries
before us
that rebuilt Europe
after the fall of the Roman Empire,
that saved culture
and preserved learning in the Middle Ages.

Monasteries of the Heart in our own time
must, as virtual communities,
as committed individuals,
define the social labor--
the peacemaking, the culture creating,
the justice making, the community building--

by which they shall personally or corporately be known.



[This reflection comes from Sr. Joan Chittister's book *The Monastery of the Heart:*

An Invitation to a Meaningful Life (BlueBridge).]

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