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## 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.

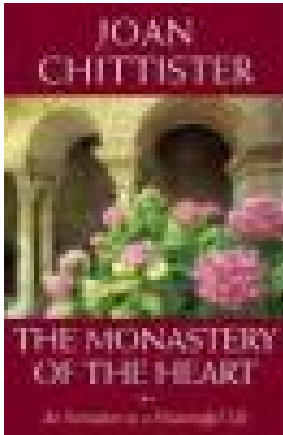
Work, in Benedictine spirituality,  
calls for labor--  
manual labor,  
spiritual labor,  
and intellectual labor--  
that continues the co-creation  
of the world.

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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