

Selling Beer in Rosemead

by Paul Ford

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I have been bothered with a question for several months now. It came to me one evening last summer when I bought beer at a Rosemead liquor store.

I looked at the young married woman who was working behind the counter (I suspected she's working at least part-time to supplement her husband's income to raise their family) and I asked myself, "Does this woman suspect that there is any connection between what she does here and what she does at Mass on Sunday?"

In these days after the feast of Christ the King, is there any connection between hairdressing, accounting, shoe-selling, trucking, or any other human 9-to-5, 40 hour per week activity and the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus?

It used to be that lay people had the impression that market place and forum, the worlds of business and government (understood in their largest meaning), were worldly places, secular, profane places.

To be a Catholic on the job meant putting in an honest day's work, paying workers a living wage, not gossiping, or stealing office supplies, being a pleasant, reliable person to work with or for. And all of these are still good.

When a Catholic wanted to be religious, there was daily

prayer and the Friday abstinence and the Sunday obligation. But is there any link between, say, sorting packages at UPS on the graveyard shift and going to Mass on Sunday?

Yes, there is. And recent Popes and theologians (especially one priest in the Los Angeles archdiocese) have been pointing out what our Lord and St. Paul spoke of as "offering our bodies as living sacrifices," as praying "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth."

Every human activity when it is done by a Christian (and Catholics are Christian), every enterprise, however humble, which puts the world ahead and makes it a fit place to live in, which tries to insure a fuller personal life in freedom for all people—all of these professions get the world, society, and human hearts ready for the gift that God has eternally wanted to give: his kingdom.

These words are a paraphrase of my mentor Msgr. James O'Reilly, late spiritual director at St. John's Seminary and professor at Mount St. Mary's College.

Doctors, nurses, lawyers, realtors, actors, printers, pharmacists, bankers, car salesmen, teachers, scientists, psychologists sought him out as spiritual friend. They learned from him that being a good Catholic doesn't stop as you go out the church door from Mass.

He affirmed beauticians and barbers in their work of grooming their fellow human beings and thereby helping people to like themselves and one another, not an easy task. Grocery store personnel understood that their labors put a smile on every customer's face as aromas filled kitchens and dining rooms all over town.

Postal service people and telephone company employees and delivery truck drivers recognized that the services they provide connected people all over the city and world.

No job was too menial that Msgr. O'Reilly couldn't find meaning-for-Kingdom in. At every position in marketplace and forum, opportunities abounded for taking care of people, of moving society ahead with more liberty and justice for all.

And all could be done for Jesus hidden in the least brother or sister, all could be done "as to the Lord," all could be done "with thanksgiving" (and adoration and petition and reparation).

As we sit down to our turkey dinners, as we kneel down at Mass this Sunday, perhaps, Msgr. O'Reilly's vision of the sacredness of our secular lives might become our own vision. We could be better Catholics for it. Even the lady behind the liquor store counter.

Work Has Dignity

The precise meaning of justice and social love is the fullness of the moral order, in connection with the entire social system and, in particular, the system of human work.

Work derives its fundamental value from the fact that it is performed by man. The dignity of work is based on this too, a dignity which must be respected independently of the type of work that man performs. What is essential is that man performs it. Whatever work he performs, he imprints on it the mark of his person: of his image and likeness to God himself. It is also of importance that man performs his work for someone, for others.

Pope John Paul II
Katowice, Poland, June 20, 1983