



THE SPIRITUALITY OF CAR REPAIR AND DOING DISHES

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Many times when I've had to go through contortions to get something fixed on our car, I wistfully wonder what it would be like to have someone else do these mundane chores for me. You know, first you have to search out a trustworthy mechanic at a price you can afford. Then there's the hassle of figuring out how to get home or to work from the repair shop and then pick it up again at the end of the day. It would be nice to have a butler or errand runner to take care of these things. Besides, I have *important* things to do. Wouldn't my time be better spent presenting a workshop to married couples, praying over the best way to handle a sensitive issue at work, or even writing this article?

Or perhaps you can relate to the household chore of doing dishes – certainly not a task of great spiritual import, or is it. It would be easy to rationalize that my time and skills could be put to much better use if a maid took care of such tedious tasks. As I reflect on this more deeply, however, I think there are several important spiritual lessons to be learned from doing the basic grunt work of life.

One is realizing that honest work has dignity in itself and that I am not more important because I may have a white-collar job rather than a blue collar one. Indeed, stay at home mothers or fathers often struggle with this lack of esteem even more since their work carries even less status in the eyes of the world. It is healthy for one's ego and soul, I think, to not put myself above others. Doing the chores of life help me check my pride and live the belief that all of us have equal value in the eyes of God. My work is not more important than my fellow travelers on this earth.

Another value is the simple experience of sharing the work of people who society often looks down upon. Being in solidarity with those who may not have much education and have to do this work to even scratch out a meager living is a form of prayer.

Another spiritual insight is to accept and honor the human condition. We are not angels or disembodied spirits who need not eat or walk or clean up after ourselves. We are human, and human mean paying attention to our bodily needs. Actually isn't this what the incarnation is about – Jesus becoming human. Jesus shared our human condition along with the accompanying realities of feeling tired, talking with people who weren't always agreeable, and grocery shopping (OK, so he had a little help from above in getting all those loaves and fishes.)

Perhaps the most telling gesture of Jesus humility and servanthood was when he washed the feet of the apostles at the Last Supper. His followers had just acclaimed him as God on Palm Sunday and here he humbles himself and kneels at the feet of the apostles and does this very earthy task of cleaning their feet.

Monks and many religious orders carry a valuable insight when they commit not only to frequent prayer but also to servile work. It's a way to see the holiness of all God's creation and that some jobs are not more honorable or holy than others.

As much as I might grumble about doing grunt work around the house or at the office, I think it is helpful to keep this balance in life. Sure I could get out of taking the car to be repaired (buy only new cars that never break down, hire somebody to do it for me, or get the kids or my spouse to do the dirty work) but periodically it's just good to have to do the dirty work like washing feet or changing diapers. It keeps me in touch and humble.

Certainly there are some menial tasks that can be reduced or eliminated with modern technology (like dishwashers, e-mail for the tedium of addressing envelopes, etc.). This may save time that can be better spent on important stuff like nurturing relationships and is to be encouraged. But sometimes its good to do the dull stuff like making coffee at the office, putting the garbage out, cleaning up after a meeting, answering the phone even if it means talking to a solicitor respectfully, so that I can recognize the holiness of these everyday tasks and the people who do them more often than I.