

Whoever Is Idle Should Not Eat (33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12—The Model of Paul the Worker

⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. ⁹ It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: *If anyone will not work, let him not eat.* ¹¹ For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. (2 Thess 3:7-12)

1. Paul the Worker: Paul was “not idle” when he was in Thessalonica (3:7)

[Paul] left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla... *And he went to see them;* ³ *and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers.* ⁴ And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.. (Acts 18:1-4)

2. The Right to Wages: Paul could have asked them to pay his way (2: 8)

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. (Luke 10:7)

3. Imitation of Paul: to give them an “example to imitate” (2:9)

4. Idleness and Food: “if anyone will not work, let him not eat” (3:10)

a. *Not* talking here about refusing to give alms to beggars (cf. Matt 5:42)

b. Talking about *believers* in church who are *able but idle* (“mere busybodies”)

5. Quiet Labor: “earn their own living” (3:12)

Living Tradition

St. Athanasius: [*St. Anthony of the Desert*] labored with his hands... because he heard: “If any man will not work, neither let him eat” [2 Thess 3:10], *spending a part for bread and a part on the needy*. He prayed continually, because he had learned that one must pray in secret without ceasing. (Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*; trans. Mary Emily Keenan)

St. Basil the Great: He who is idle, although able to work, should not eat; moreover, he who is occupied with some task which is rightly intended for the glory of Christ ought to hold himself to a pursuit of work within his ability. (Basil the Great, *Letters*; trans. Agnes

Clare Way)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. To whom does Paul's statement, "if anyone will not work, let him not eat" (1 Thess 3:10) apply? To whom does it not apply?

For Further Reading

1. Nathan Eubank. *First and Second Thessalonians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2019.
2. Peter Gorday, *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000.