

PASTOR'S CHAPTER TALK / MAY 25: MANUAL LABOR AND BALANCE IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

As it happens, today we have the option of celebrating three saints for May 25: St. Bede, St. Gregory VII and St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi. All three lived the contemplative life, two according to the Rule of St. Benedict, and all three presumably were no strangers to manual labor.

The *Rule of St. Benedict* is one of the most famous teachings on how to live the monastic life, and, as such, a radical form of Christianity. In Chapter 48 of the *Rule*, St. Benedict writes, "Idleness is the enemy of the soul; and therefore the brethren ought to be employed in manual labor at certain times, at others, in devout reading."

Monks live by the work of their hands. At minimum, they maintain the monastery and its related buildings and grounds, which usually means everything from plumbing to landscaping, and of course daily cleaning. Many monasteries also have their own small industries. For example, Trappist monks specialize in many forms of food products – beer, fruitcakes, jam, wine – all of which involve some kind of manual farm work and processing and packaging.

But the most important foundation for manual labor, for working with our hands, is because it is part of a rhythm and balance in our daily life of discipleship, even if we aren't monks. We want to have a balance of mind, body and spirit. And when we have a harmony with these key aspects of a human life, we believe we also have the secret to a fruitful life of faith.