television documentary ‘Affluenza’ begins, like a soap opera, with background organ music. A doctor is examining a woman whose symptoms include a terrible emptiness that hasn’t been relieved by a new car, a new house, a boat, or a recent raise. As the organ music swells, the doctor announces: ‘Affluenza!’

“After this mock opening, psychologist Jessie O’Neill, once a victim of runaway materialism who now specializes in its treatment, tells viewers that affluenza can make a factory worker spend a chunk of every paycheck on the lottery, a corporate executive see little of his family in order to earn eight million dollars instead of seven million dollars a year, a secretary use food money on fashion sales, or a teenager steal for a pair of sneakers. Affluenza can also show up in more subtle ways:
• Having little life outside of work
• Being preoccupied with your external appearance
• Feeling unfulfilled despite having many things
• Imagining that a new outfit, another vacation, or renovating the house will make you happy

“In truth, none of us is immune to the seduction of trying to slake what is really a spiritual thirst with things that money can buy, though doing so is like drinking salt water from the sea. It turns immediate gratification into a life-threatening condition.

“A far different path is the life of faith. To believe in Jesus is to trust him as Savior and follow him as Lord. That puts us on a quest entirely different than that of acquiring things, because Jesus wants to transform our purpose in life from one of getting to one of giving. When that happens, material possessions take on a new meaning. Paradoxically, they mean less and more at the same time. They mean less because they no longer have a possessive hold on us, and are no longer seen as necessary to satisfy our heart’s desire. But they also mean more, because the eyes of faith, seeing their true value, can honor them as blessings entrusted to us by their rightful owner, who wants them to be used in ways that accomplish his purposes.

“Following Jesus places us sharply at odds with prevailing values.”


**Reflect**

• What are some sources of strength for you as you move against the cultural stream?
• Who or what encourages you most in your faith life?

**Blessings**

O Lord, baptize our hearts into a sense of the needs and conditions of all.

George Fox, 17th Century
**Our Story**

Continued from the front...

what was right and wrong. Thomas could have agreed with him, but he thought that the king was doing wrong, so he resigned. The king tried to make Thomas agree with him, promising him all sorts of rewards, but Thomas could not do that. Therefore, the king ordered Thomas to be beheaded. Just before he died, he said to the onlookers, “I die the king’s good servant, but God’s first.”

Kate Dooley, O.P.

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**TABLETALK**

- How is your study or work part of God’s ongoing creation? How does what you do reflect gospel values?
- What satisfaction do you derive from your study or work?

**Pondering the Word**

“For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Luke 19:10

Who are the lost? Reflect on Jesus seeking and saving the lost.

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**Parenting**

Public life is not merely an option for those who feel drawn to it, but an arena into which God calls us. We are to show hospitality to the stranger as if to God. For Jesus, who identified himself with the hungry and the prisoner, the stranger is one of those who suffer most, who is among the needy of our society. It is through the stranger that we know and serve God. “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (See 1 John 3:17.) We are not first individuals who choose to come together to form society, but interdependent social beings whose individuality emerges in relationship to others. Jesus’ “kingdom” envisions a community working for justice, peace, and love by establishing a civic life accountable to people’s needs.

For a Christian, it is important to live this vision of the kingdom. For parents, it is a challenge to teach this common good vision to their children.

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**Family Activities**

One barrier in this task for the common good is the sharp distinction we make between public and private life. Individualism is stressed more than public responsibility today. But persons who serve the common good need to love the world. When we love something, we take it seriously. God loved the world enough to send his Son. That love for the world continues to be expressed through the efforts of God’s people.

Share your vision for the common good by listing groups and organizations that work for the common good, including those in your local area. Plan on using your time and gifts in public service for the common good. Share how you see this reflecting your faith.

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**Common Good**

“Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ.”

Explore the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* See paragraphs 2427-2428.

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“THE ART OF PROGRESS IS TO PRESERVE ORDER AMID CHANG AND TO PRESERVE CHANGE AMID ORDER.”

Alfred North Whitehead