God's Noiseless Work
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Soon Hollywood will be wrapping up its annual award season with the Academy Awards and all the accompanying pomp and circumstance. The weeks leading up to this event are filled with praise for the actors, directors, producers, costume designers and many other individuals listed in a movie’s credits. Moreover, there are non-stop publicity campaigns meant to increase the chances that any given work will earn that tiny golden idol we call “Oscar.”

As a society, we often honor the works of celebrities be they actors, athletes or artists. We celebrate their talent, their determination and even their good-looks. We pay tribute to the difference they make in our lives by making us think and laugh and care about things outside of our own circumstances. Why? Because they do make a difference, but also because they demand recognition for those efforts.

I just returned from Washington, D.C, where I represented Christian Brothers University at the meeting of the American Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Highlighted at the meeting was the work and words of Cardinal John Henry Newman, who was recently beatified by Pope Benedict. However, I found it most interesting that the theme for the meeting was “God’s noiseless work.”

As I reflected on this idea of “noiseless work,” good deeds that draw neither attention to themselves, nor to the hands that toiled in accomplishment, I began to consider how easy it is to forget that as men and women in Christ we are called to these hidden works. The Gospel of Matthew states clearly to “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

We should not search for acknowledgment of our contributions, and we should not announce them. Nor should we seek the admiration of those whose lives are improved as a result. Consider His purpose. If God uses our hands and voices for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built and multiplied, why should we take any credit at all?

We know that we are justified by faith, apart from our works, so why are they so important? Hidden works like anonymously making sandwiches that feed hungry children or giving sacrificially to fund education in developing nations or rummaging through closets to find warm clothing for homeless veterans do not just benefit the recipients of this charity. They benefit our community and they benefit us through the blessings we are promised. More importantly, our hidden works glorify God, through demonstrating our trust and belief in Him.

As you reflect on this last week, what were your hidden works? Who have you helped, not because you had to or were asked to and not because you expected thanks? Did you go out of your way to offer an encouraging word? Perhaps your days were filled with examples of hidden works that made a difference in the lives of friends and strangers, but I cannot claim that distinction. I have challenged myself in the coming weeks to make a conscious effort, despite the everyday demands of life, to remember that all I have and will have is by the grace of God and that in return, He asks so little. This I can do, and so can you.