

Easter VI  
5/14/2023

## OBEDIENCE OF THE HEART

As the Easter season continues, we look ahead to the great feast of Pentecost. We look toward the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks today of the Father and Holy Spirit. He tells us of the Holy Spirit who will be with us always.

Jesus speaks of obedience, love and the Holy Spirit. Love is a popular word but obedience not so much. While some may consider obedience and love as being mutually exclusive, they are in fact, bound together and complement one another. Obviously, here Jesus is talking about obedience to God doing what is right. There's external obedience where we do what is right out of fear or because we know it's right and then there's internal obedience or obedience of the heart where we make a gift of ourselves out of love.

If the only reason you do what is right is out of external obedience, keep doing it. That's a good thing but to grow to where you do it out of love is a better thing, a much better thing. If you love someone that means you seek the highest good for that person and that you're willing to do what is necessary for that person—in other words, to be obedient not necessarily to that person's wants but to that person's needs. To get up in the middle of the night to care for a crying baby, a sick child or even a suffering parent, is an act of obedience, the obedience of love.

Obedience of the heart isn't about self-deprecation but about listening to God and giving God his proper place in our lives. It's about putting the needs of others ahead of our own wants. Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Obedience is the proof of love. This isn't a vague or sentimental love but a love that is strong, that has been forged by difficulties. It's lived out usually in the ordinary events of daily life: being faithful to who we are; being patient with those who irritate us, living lives of intentional faith that are generous in every little way.

One of the most fundamental ways of growing in holiness is to be faithful to the responsibilities of our daily lives. As Christians, our lives are marked by obedience to Christ. This is more than something external however. The goal of our obedience and love is a deeper relationship with God, with lives of intentional faith but without

obedience to Christ's commands, this relationship dissolves into an empty show, shallow emotionalism or worse. Obedience to following Christ can cost us. Look at the lives of the martyrs, the other saints and people you know in your own lives or perhaps in your own life.

Unlike some human commands, God's commands are always given out of love. Human commands can come out of ego, moodiness or power trips, God's commands always come out of pure goodness, out of love and it's out of love that we should keep them. At least as we grow spiritually, they should be kept more out of love than fear. Our own St. Therese spoke of ascending to God by the elevator of love rather than climbing the stairway of fear.

All of God's commandments whether those regarding how we treat others, human life, family, our sexuality, our business, our friends and even our enemies, are given to us out of love. Obedience is the measure of our love and as we obey, so we love. Pope Francis has noted:

*The Word of God is given to us as the Word of life, which transforms the heart, life; which renews, which does not judge in order to condemn, but heals and has forgiveness as its aim. God's mercy is thus. A Word that is light for our steps. All this is the work of the Holy Spirit!*

Fortunately, we don't do this by ourselves. Jesus says he will send another advocate, the Spirit of truth to guide and strengthen us. Jesus speaks of another advocate because he is our first advocate. Through the advocate of the Holy Spirit. God continues to be present in the world today. The Holy Spirit gives us courage and strength to love and follow God's commandments out of love. Through the Holy Spirit, the work of Jesus continues, the same Holy Spirit the newly baptized Christians received in the first reading. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and there's a moral force that comes with the truth. Through the Holy Spirit we have life and through the Holy Spirit we share in the communion of the Father and the Son. So too, we share in a communion at this and every Eucharist.

Obedience to God is the servant of love and love is the elevator that can draw us into the very life of God, the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The source of our being and our ultimate destination are found in the love of God. Through obedience of the heart, may all of us share in that destination, not through the steep stairway of fear but by the elevator of love.