

5<sup>th</sup> Lent Year B  
March 22, 2015

*He learned obedience through what he suffered.*

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

If you asked a novice in religious formation preparing to make a profession of the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, the answer might indicate that chastity would be the most difficult, followed by poverty and that obedience would be the easiest of the three. If you asked that same person twenty years later, the answer may be quite different. The virtue of obedience is a tremendous challenge for many because the more that we realize that we are not in charge of our life, the more we try to control it.

“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” In our brief reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, we are given a valuable lesson in the virtue of obedience to God’s will. And who could possibly know this better than Jesus? Always obedient to the will of the Father, his suffering made possible our redemption.

While we may not be called to lay down our lives, there is no question that we will be given ample opportunity to learn the virtue of obedience— and sometimes it hurts, it stings. Obedience challenges even the most docile amongst us to question the wisdom of the one to whom we are being obedient, or even God Himself.

At its core, obedience is the “moral virtue that inclines the human will to comply with the will of another who has the right and authority to command.” It has been described as “in a certain way the mother of all virtues”<sup>1</sup> because if we obey, the practice of the other virtues will follow naturally. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274AD) declared that God is to be obeyed in all things, while human authorities are to be obeyed in certain things.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Augustine, (401 A.D.) *De Bono Conjugali* “On the Good of Marriage,” para. #30

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II, Question 104, Articles 4 and 5)

Obedience to human beings is not absolute, because it is limited by higher laws that must not be transgressed. We do not have to obey a manifestly unjust law. But obedience to God is absolute, though the difficulty comes in trying to determine exactly what God's will is for us in our lives, a process that is closely linked to our happiness.

Our happiness in life is determined by many factors, some within our control, others not. That which is beyond our control can frustrate and complicate even the best laid plans. As a result, we can become extremely angry or feel that we have been dealt one bad hand after another.

And yet when all is said and done, and here's the hard truth—ultimately no one is responsible for your happiness except you. If we continually seek to look to blame others for our own unhappiness, we will never become adults in the faith. I humbly propose that obedience to God brings peace.

“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.”

For example, in attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, we are being directly obedient to God's command to honor the Sabbath. In following the Church's laws concerning the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, or the guidelines for Lenten prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we show our willingness to be part of a larger community of faith.

As citizens, we pay taxes to the rightful authority and defend their country from the enemies. We often do not like how our tax dollars are spent, and yet we pay them in order to avoid an even bigger fallout, namely a country where no one followed the laws.

So why do we struggle with obedience? It is too facile to dismiss disobedience as merely a result of adolescent rebellion, for our experience teaches that it extends well beyond these years. We need to inculcate at an early age the positive value of this virtue.

Obedience is fundamentally a response to God, a listening to the voice of God in the deepest recesses of our heart. Obedience sometimes makes very strong demands on us. We reach a decisive moment and we will have to choose our path.

Am I the master of my own life, or am I the servant of the gift of life I have received from another? Do I determine my path in life or do I listen for the guidance of the One who has a plan for me?

Obedience is difficult because it so often entails doing that which deep down we understand we may need to do, but would prefer not to do. It is a moment of truth, and we need God's grace to make the right decision.

We reach these moments in our lives, and we cannot escape them, nor should we fear them. Ultimately, it is about listening attentively to the Lord, for He seeks only to lead us closer to Him.