

Obedience and Fidelity

“All the paths of the Lord are kindness and constancy toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees” (*Ps* 25:10).

Obedience is described as the willingness of someone to submit and fulfill someone else’s wish or order. The Scripture is flooded with examples of obedience as well as disobedience to the word of God. Right in the first book of the Scripture it is written about the disobedience of the first parents - they ate from the forbidden tree (cf. *Gen* 3:1-6). Also, when the first king of Israel, Saul, did not obey the word of God, the prophet Samuel told him, “Obedience is better than sacrifice” (*1 Sam* 15:22). Therefore, the psalmist says, “Sacrifice or oblation you wished not, but ears open to obedience you gave me. Holocausts or sin-offering you sought not; then said I, ‘Behold I come; in the written scroll it is prescribed for me. To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart!’” (*Ps* 40:7-8) In the same spirit, the author of the Letter to Hebrews writes, “For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins. For this reason, when he came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, behold, I come to do your will, O God’” (*Heb* 10:4-7). These words refer to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was the most obedient to the will of His Father.

Pope, St. John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris custos* (30), writes that already at the beginning of human redemption, after Mary, we find the model of obedience made incarnate in St. Joseph, the man known for having faithfully carried out God's commands.

Joseph positively responded to God’s word given to him at the decisive moment. He did not respond to the angel’s message the same way as Mary did, from whom the angel expected an answer. The angel came to Joseph just to announce God’s will. He did not need Joseph’s immediate answer. Joseph understood; he did not talk with the angel, he did not question the angel. Although fully aware of the seriousness of his vocation, he could have many questions asking the angel for explanation. However, he accepted God’s message silently.

Father Michael Gasnier, O.P. writes, “He (Joseph) asked himself how he, a simple village workman, could ever have been chosen for this role. Far from being puffed up, he was penetrated through and through with the conviction of his lowliness and poverty. He told himself that such was God’s will. Certain of God’s help, he felt able to bear the weight of his responsibility. At once he gave his consent. It would not be like him to answer heaven’s favor by protesting his inability, his unworthiness. When the Almighty speaks, the thing to do is to answer YES at once” (GASNIER, M., O.P.: *Joseph The Silent*, p. 72).

And “Joseph did as the angel of the Lord had commended him and took his wife into his home” (*Mt* 1:24). “What he did”, writes Pope, St. John Paul II, “is the clearest obedience of faith. The Council teaches, ‘The obedience of faith must be given to God as He reveals Himself. By this obedience of faith man freely commits himself entirely to God, making the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals, and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him.’ This statement, which touches the very essence of faith, is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth” (JOHN PAUL II: *Redemptoris custos*, 4).

When Joseph awoke, he obeyed God’s will and took Mary into his home. However, the angel of the Lord came at night with the message again. It was a warning of Herod, “Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt” (*Mt* 2:13). The obedient Joseph, far from being shocked by the command, thought only of carrying it out. Father Gasnier writes that another person “might have been

completely nonplussed and upset.” Joseph could complain that Almighty God “must fly from the people”; that God, who “has at His command legions of angels,” is not able to protect His Son; that the Prince of Peace brings turmoil; that it is night and they are not ready for such a long and dangerous journey, etc. However, these thoughts were far from Joseph. “He was well aware that it was he, Joseph, whom God had chosen to serve Mary and the child, those two beings who were far dearer to him than life.” He was willing silently to “pay the price this sublime vocation called for.” He also wanted to “take part in the work of redemption. Besides, he had but desire, no passion, he longed for one thing only—to carry out the designs of God no matter what the cost” (cf. GASNIER, M., O.P.: *Joseph The Silent*, p. 106-107).

So Joseph arose at night and went. The angel of the Lord came again and again. Such fidelity! No one, no twice, but always when Joseph received the message from God, he silently and immediately obeyed.

Alphonse Marie possessed a well-balanced personality. Her lively nature urged her to action. Even during her childhood a tenacious perseverance was evident in her, which at times even bordered on stubbornness. When her mother told her that disobedience is a sin, she began to fight against it. However, it happened that her self-will revolted and resented and she found obedience difficult. Although she maintained respect for her parents, when they crossed her plans, especially when she wanted to pray and they gave her orders to do something, in her inner self, she stubbornly resented them. Once, after she had committed this fault, she heard an interior voice say, “It is not your prayer that I want, but your obedience”. On another occasion, she remained longer at prayer instead of leaving at once and attending to the task given her. And again the interior voice spoke. “Obedience is more pleasing to me than prayer.” Totally dismayed, she rose and sobbed. After that, she tried very hard not to act according to her self-will.

When her parents did not give her their consent to enter a convent, she obediently submitted, although she felt deep pain.

In her interior suffering, Alphonse Marie had support not only in prayer, but also in obedience to her confessor. The second support sometimes was tottering and she would hear the voice of the tempter whispering, “Your confessor does not really know you. You have not sufficiently revealed the depths of your heart to him. Obedience cannot help you, you don’t really have to obey” (PERRIN, J.: *The Life of Mother Alphonse-Marie*, p. 20). She earnestly prayed and fled to God with a living faith. In the most severe aridity, she remained steadfast, calm, and obedient. She completely submitted herself to the judgment of her confessor asking him for advice and faithfully followed his guidance.

Later, her confessor Father Reichard wrote about her to his bishop, “Her revelations are of a lofty and enthusiastic piety, but always founded upon deep humility, blind obedience, and perfect self denial, as well as interior and exterior mortification. This person, who has been sick for three years ... does everything in the spirit of obedience” (PERRIN, J.: *The Life of Mother Alphonse-Marie*, p. 30).

Her glowing love for Jesus Christ, her union with the crucified in the patient endurance of suffering, her great devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin, her perfect obedience toward the Church and its Servants were deprived of every self-love. In a spirit of deep humility, she constantly practiced in the vow of obedience. From her youth, she had marveled at God's greatness and majesty. On the other hand, she was also aware of human insignificance. In this attitude of mind, she gladly submitted herself to the recommendations and the advice of her spiritual director and of the Bishop. When Bishop Räss refused to give her permission to enter a convent, as always obedient, she saw in

this decision God's will. She always showed him deep respect, absolute confidence, and perfect obedience.

After founding the Congregation, she observed the prescriptions of the community with meticulous exactitude, and with marked preference, those that were less to her liking. Once she made a decision before God she relentlessly carried it through, and nothing could restrain her; she always faithfully fulfilled His will. Although many things must have struck her natural shyness, she went straight to the known goal.

This spirit of obedience was transmitted by her to her Sisters, and she led the way by her own good example. She said, "Obedience is the presupposition of every victory. What a powerful weapon obedience is! With it, one can persevere in the battle against the evil enemy more courageously, with joyful countenance and with a joyful heart. Satan uses all means for introducing falsehood and deception into everything and thus lessens the value of even the best actions. Obedience is the best means to escape his snares. On the path of obedience you will not meet the tempter. With obedience, every victory is certain" (*Ibid*, p. 76).

When a certain Bishop accused Alphonse Marie that she was a false prophet and predicted her great confusion and embarrassment, the Lord von Cissey sent a letter to the Bishop defending her. He speaks of her obedience and humility, of the charity that is practiced through her work, and of the affirmation of her Superiors. He added the statement of Father Reichard, "I myself tremble in fear of being deceived, and yet I am forced to reassure and calm the fears of the poor Mother, who is even more fearful than I am. She is always uneasy, questioning whether she has been deceived. She is always ready even to disregard the revelations, which she makes known only out of obedience. She has only one desire, to be submissive to the Will of God in all" (*Ibid*, p. 95).

Obedience, humility and fidelity are virtues despised by the world. Power, selfishness, and disdain are the weapons it uses. Therefore, there is no peace. Only the Almighty Ruler of heaven and earth can make peace, yet through the humble and obedient souls which are looking to fulfill God's will, as St. Joseph and Blessed Alphonse Marie show us.