

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE FEAST OF THE KINGS

Gospel: Saint Matthew 8: 1-13

On the faith that should be shown in obedience

9.1 First Point

A centurion, whose servant lay sick at his house, as today's Gospel tells us, begged Jesus Christ to come and cure him.⁹⁰ But then, having reflected that there was no need for Jesus to go to all this trouble because it was sufficient for him to give a command to the servant to get well for him to be immediately cured, so the centurion went to meet the Savior to tell him that a single word of his would suffice to heal the sick man. Jesus, admiring the faith of the centurion, said that he had not found such great faith in all Israel.⁹¹

This centurion makes known to us how excellent obedience is when it is inspired and sustained by faith. In fact, those who obey their superiors with the conviction that they are obeying God, himself, elevate their obedience by this view of faith so that it becomes one of the most eminent acts of the virtue of religion that we can elicit in this world, since it is addressed directly to God hidden under the veil of a person frail and mortal, but, endowed with divine authority. This is how the centurion acted when seeing in Jesus Christ only the external appearance of an ordinary man, he was nevertheless deeply convinced that in order to perform a miracle such as the cure of the sick servant, he possessed the authority of God himself and was consequently truly God.

Do you obey with like dispositions and with this pure and simple view of faith? Do you obey God hidden beneath the appearance of a man, a man who cannot command you except by reason of God's power residing in him? Is this view of faith the only motive which leads you to submit promptly and blindly? It is the only motive that will free your obedience from all human considerations.

9.2 Second Point

The centurion told Jesus that a single word of his would suffice to cure his servant. He confirmed this by his own behavior with regard to the soldiers in his command to whom he needed to say only a word in order to be obeyed instantly.⁹² The conclusion to be drawn from this is that if some, out of purely human considerations, show themselves so submissive to another whom they look upon as their leader, with how much greater reason should those who have consecrated themselves to God and who should act only according to his spirit be obliged to fulfill on the spot whatever is enjoined on them by their superior? They should have nothing but God in view when so acting, because they should be convinced that it is God who commands them in the superior's person.

Does it take only a word or a sign from your superior to make you set everything aside or to undertake anything right away for the sole motive that this word is a word coming from God, and that that sign is made by God himself? This simple view of faith leads obedient persons to transcend themselves and to see only God where often he is not apparent, and leave aside all the sentiments that human nature might suggest. Renew in yourself from time to time this view of faith regarding obedience. To convince yourself more fully, often adore God in those who command you.

9.3 Third Point

The centurion was entirely right. As soon as he believed that Jesus could heal his servant with a single word, his servant was in fact cured.⁹³ This grace was granted, thanks to the excellence and vigor of his faith. In the same way it takes only a word from a superior to a religious truly obedient and filled with lively faith, to accomplish in that person great miracles and bring about the most surprising effects of grace.

Obedience practiced this way leads the one who obeys to make no reply to the one who commands and to find no difficulty in executing the orders. Even if the thing commanded is difficult to carry out, the love with which one obeys makes it agreeable, and all is done with joy. In this way one has the simplicity of a child who does not know how to choose or argue, because the simplicity with which one obeys enlightens the mind with a view fixed on God and suppresses all other human reasoning and consideration.

Is this how you obey? Do you not advance reasons to excuse yourself from doing what you have been commanded? If you do not do this openly and verbally, does not your mind nevertheless often take satisfaction dwelling on the alternatives it considers good and even better and more appropriate than what has been enjoined by the superior?

Pay attention to the fact that we must not obey by reason, but by grace, and through a simple view of faith. Whoever listens to reason acts only in a human manner, not as a disciple faithful to the voice of Jesus Christ, which should always guide us by the spirit of faith.

90 Lk 7:2-3

91 Mt 8:8-10

92 Mt 8:8-9

93 Mt 8:13