

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE FEAST OF THE KINGS

Gospel: Saint Matthew 8: 23-27

On the fidelity in obedience we ought to have  
in spite of the most violent temptations

### 10.1 First Point

When Jesus was in a boat there arose on the sea so great a storm that the vessel was covered by the waves. The disciples having lovingly appealed to him, he got up and commanded the winds and seas to be quiet, and there ensued a deep calm which so astonished those present that they said, Who is this man whom winds and seas obey?<sup>94</sup>

To live in a community that is faithful to the Rule is to live in the boat with Jesus and his disciples, because those who live there have left the world to follow Jesus, have put themselves under his guidance, and have become his disciples. There they are protected from the waves of the stormy sea of this world, that is, from a great many occasions that are found there for offending God. Still, they are not entirely safe from all difficulties and temptations. Of these the most dangerous and most hurtful are those which lead us to fail in obedience, or to obey in a faulty manner. Because we have entered the community only to obey, as soon as we separate ourselves from obedience, we forfeit the graces we need to persevere in this state of life. This is why it is so important that persons living in community have at their disposal the means needed to protect themselves against temptations of this sort.

It is, therefore, very appropriate for you, who are exposed to such temptations every day, to have remedies to keep you from their evil consequences. You should take great care about this and give it your whole effort, because your faithfulness to your vocation ordinarily depends on this. What you should, therefore, beg most often of God is that he teach you how to obey and to obey well, in spite of the obstacles and difficulties which the demon will stir up in you to give you a dislike for obedience.

### 10.2 Second Point

The most considerable and most frequent temptations and difficulties concerning obedience arise either over those who command or over what is commanded. Those referring to the persons who command stem from the fact that we look upon them as merely human, even though for us they hold the place of God, and consequently should be considered only from this point of view. There is no power, says Saint Paul, that does not come from God,<sup>95</sup> particularly when it is a question of ordering, or commanding, or forbidding anything referring to our salvation.

It is no doubt to make us realize this truth and remember it, that after most of the passages in the Old Testament where God gives injunctions, he adds: I am the Lord or I am the Lord your God.<sup>96</sup> For we cannot emancipate ourselves from the obligation of obeying God, nor, consequently, can anyone in a community fail in obedience to the superiors without becoming guilty of disobedience toward God. This is why no matter what lack of sympathy one may experience with regard to a superior, this must refer only to the individual, never to the role, because in obeying one does not submit to a person, but to God.

Never use your personal grievances as a pretext to dispense you from obeying your superiors, for this would direct your ill feeling against God himself.

### 10.3 Third Point

The second sort of temptation against the obedience due to superiors, and the most ordinary one, is to think that one cannot fulfill what they prescribe because it is too difficult or because one experiences too great a repugnance for it. Neither of these two pretexts can exempt us from obeying if we consider that what is commanded, and what we perform in obeying, is God's will.

God knows what you are capable of, and he is not going to command you things above your strength.<sup>97</sup> If indeed they are difficult in themselves, it is up to him to impart to you the ability you need to carry them out. For, as Saint Paul says, God gives us not only the will to do what is right, but also the grace to accomplish it,<sup>98</sup> and a will forearmed and sustained by God's grace to achieve something good, finds nothing difficult because God smoothes out all the obstacles encountered in the action.

This happened in the case of those inferiors who threw themselves into the fire and emerged unscathed, or who did other equally difficult things at the first order given them by their superiors. Did not Jesus Christ through obedience perform something extremely difficult when he died on a cross for the sins of all of us?

We must, therefore, overcome our repugnances and the other hindrances we find in what is commanded, for if we are determined to obey only in those things for which we feel a natural inclination, we really intend to do our own will, not God's. We should be convinced that in obeying we are carrying out the will of God, as we learn from Saint Paul, who, speaking to those who are obliged to obey, urges them to do whatever they have to do with a willing heart, not as if obeying man, but God.<sup>99</sup> Cassian also affirms that we must do what superiors enjoin as if these were commandments given us by God from high heaven; no doubt, if we considered them in this light, we would not fail to be faithful.

94 Mt 8:23-27

95 Rom 13:1

96 Lv 11:44

97 1 Cor 10:13

98 Phil 2:13

99 Eph 6:7