

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE FEAST OF THE KINGS

Gospel: Saint Matthew 13: 31-35

The great benefit produced by what is done
through obedience, however insignificant it seems in itself

12.1 First Point

In today's Gospel Jesus Christ declares that the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds and which however, when it has grown becomes a tree such that the birds of the sky come to rest in its branches.¹⁰³

The same can be said of something done out of obedience, even though it may be quite insignificant in appearance; it is, nevertheless, quite considerable because it is done out of obedience. Eating, for instance, or gathering up the crumbs remaining on the table, or sweeping a room, washing dishes, attaching a pin: all such tasks seem to be trifles in themselves, but when performed through obedience, they become highly significant actions because their object is God himself, since we obey God in performing them.

As a result, this virtue, more than any other, can be associated with the theological virtues, for faith is its principle and guide; it is always accompanied by hope and confidence in God, and it is a result of charity and the pure love of God.

Even the birds of the sky, that is, the virtues which belong to the saints in heaven, rest¹⁰⁴ on those who obey, for they experience a joy, consolation, and interior peace which cannot be adequately expressed and which are not found in such perfection in anyone on earth except in those who obey solely in view of God.

Experience for yourself how good the Lord is¹⁰⁵ and how true all this is, for throughout your whole life you have to place all your affection in obeying.

12.2 Second Point

One could attribute to obedience what Solomon says of Wisdom, that all good things come to us along with it.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, whoever obeys in a spirit of religion possesses all the virtues: he is humble, because he must be humble to submit to another; he is gentle, because no matter how irksome the thing commanded may be, he does not complain; he is silent, because the truly obedient man has lost the use of his tongue and knows only how to do what is ordered without making any reply; he is patient, because he endures everything¹⁰⁷ and bears all the burdens imposed on him; he is charitable beyond measure, because obedience makes him undertake all things for the good of his neighbor.

This is why Saint Bonaventure says that obedience must enter into everything done in a community; without it all the most perfect actions cease to be good. Fasting itself, which is so meritorious before God, is rejected when inspired by self-will; in this case a person assumes the proprietorship of an action over which God alone possesses sovereign dominion and for which that person has the right only to do what God requires of him.

We should consider ourselves happy to be in a state that requires obedience of us; we should look upon this virtue in itself as the mother and support of all the other virtues. But if you wish this to be true in your case, you must practice it with all possible perfection. For God gives this grace only to those who have renounced self-will and who look upon his will as the rule and principle of all they do.

12.3 Third Point

The main benefit obedience produces in a religious person is that it procures for us the perfection proper to our state, fortifies us in it, and assures perseverance. In fact, says Saint Dorotheus, nothing helps us fulfill our religious duties better than renouncing our self-will. This is the most appropriate means we can use to acquire all sorts of virtues. By often sacrificing our self-will, we acquire great control over our passions and inclinations and possess our souls undisturbed in every sort of circumstance. This is the highest perfection.

That is what made Cassian say that a person achieves purity of heart and fervor in religion in proportion to the progress achieved in obedience. Saint Ignatius, in the third part of his Constitutions (Chapter I, paragraphs 21, 22, 23) affirms that it is not just expedient but actually most necessary in his community for all to practice obedience perfectly if they wish to advance in virtue and in the perfection of their state.

Nor is there anything that renders a religious more firm and unshakeable, thanks to the respect and the love that it inspires for all the observances of the religious life. These are the safe and sure paths to acquire fully the spirit of one's state and to persevere in it. For why do some fail to persevere? Is it not because they lose their love for the rules and practices of the community, eventually grow disgusted with them, and carry them out only grudgingly?

From this you may conclude how important it is that above all else you love the practice of obedience and give it your best effort. According to Sulpicius Severus, it is the first and most important of all the virtues which enhance a community. Rest assured that you will not love your state and will not have its spirit except in so far as you are faithful to obedience.

103 Mt 13:31-32

104 Mt 13:32

105 Ps 43:9

106 Wis 7:11

107 See 1 Cor 13:4-7