

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY
Gospel: Saint Matthew 20: 1-16

That persons consecrated to God need to be
exercised in the practice of obedience

13.1 First Point

There are many persons in religious communities who could be asked with more surprise and more justice than those in the Gospel who were standing idle in the market place: Why have you stayed here all the day doing nothing?¹⁰⁸ These persons have consecrated themselves to God and profess to be striving toward the perfection proper to their state, yet they remain in it without making any progress in virtue, especially the virtue of obedience. Although they are pledged in a special manner to practice it, they are not observed doing so to any great extent.

Often enough their superior must accommodate himself to their disposition or inclinations. As a result, they do not practice obedience, or if they do, it is only a conditional sort of obedience, or else it varies from day to day, or it remains on a purely human level. One can truly say that they really never do practice genuine obedience at all. Ah, how deeply are they to be pitied: they are not exercised in the practice of obedience and always remain newcomers in the practice of this virtue!

13.2 Second Point

It would seem that this disorder arises from two sources. The first lies in those who have undertaken the practice of obedience, but who do not offer themselves spontaneously actually to practice the virtue. They say that it is enough for them to follow the ordinary community activities and to carry out exteriorly, and all too often very negligently, their usual duties.

So, when it happens that they are given an order they did not expect, they cannot accept it; they say this is too much for them and they are not able to put up with such a trial. In this way they find everything enjoined on them to be above their strength and beyond their virtue; they are not readily disposed to be called upon to obey.

This defective conduct is also found in inferiors who wish to sell their submission too dearly. They are prepared to carry out orders only on certain conditions which they claim the right to require from their superiors, or only when they are in a good humor.

Ah, how unhappy we are when we are obliged to obey and are not willingly disposed toward obedience! That is when the practice of obedience really becomes difficult.

13.3 Third Point

The second source of this disorder comes from the superiors who leave their inferiors in a kind of laziness; they do not give them opportunities to practice obedience. The idle laborers said that no one has put us to work.¹⁰⁹ That is why some religious never acquire this virtue, for like all the others, it becomes easy only with practice. It even requires more effort than others, because to obey properly we must overcome ourselves and renounce our own views and natural inclinations.

When such inferiors are told to do something, some of them do it only in part, or only in an external manner; others answer back, or plead reasons for excusing themselves from obeying; others even refuse outright to obey.

Ah, how unfortunate are those religious whose superiors give them no opportunity or scarcely any opportunity to practice obedience! For it is extremely important that those who profess to practice this virtue be given a chance to do so every day.

108 Mt 20:6

109 Mt 20:7