

Reflection on Obedience

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Obedience... just the sound of the word conjures up thoughts of freedom restricting compliance. The Character Council defines obedience as, "Quickly and cheerfully carrying out the direction of those who are responsible for me." Cheerfully? How can someone be happy about losing his freedom?

In reality, rather than restricting our freedom, obedience allows us to have freedom. If we don't obey traffic laws, we are not free to drive. If we break the laws set for us by society we may end up in jail leaving us with no freedom at all. Laws are enacted in the first place to ensure that the freedoms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness cannot be taken from us.

People who enter consecrated religious life such as priests and religious brothers and sisters take a vow of obedience to their superiors. In a way, this is a form of humility, which expresses their acknowledgement that they don't know it all. They submit themselves to the will of God as expressed through their superiors. There is a certain level of trust assumed here as well that their superiors are following the will of God and not their own selfish desires.

Corruption exists because we are all sinners and imperfect in one way or another. It is therefore the responsibility of everyone to make himself aware of what is right and acceptable in the eyes of God. Thankfully, it's not just a guessing game. God has been very clear about what it is that pleases Him by handing down to us Sacred Scripture and the traditions of our faith. When faced with a request for obedience, we must measure it against such reliable sources as the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, Psalms, Gospel accounts, etc. Leaders like Hitler will come and thankfully go. When we are aware of what it is God expects of us, we can be more vigilant about our allegiances.

Examples of obedience fill the bible. Beginning with Adam and Eve, Abraham and Moses, from Genesis to Revelation, obedience and its rewards abound. Abraham was instructed by God to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22:1-18. Obediently, he did as he was told. Trusting in the absolute authority of God he "reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the Lord's messenger called to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham!' 'Yes, Lord.' he answered. 'Do not lay your hand on the boy.' Said the messenger." (Gen. 22:10-12) And with that God rewarded Abraham's obedience by allowing Isaac to live.

When the time came, Mary showed her obedience to God by saying "yes" to His plan for salvation and allowing Jesus Christ to enter the world through her no matter how inconvenient or unbelievable it would be. "Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.'" (Luke 1:38) And of course, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ opened up the gates of heaven and made salvation possible for us by humbling himself and "becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8) While Abraham was spared the sacrificing of his son, God allowed Jesus to die for our freedom. The freedom to enjoy eternity in heaven is well worth the obedience it takes to get there!