

Obedience That Is Internal, External, Extraordinary, and Joyful¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Paris, Wednesday, September 1, 1858

My Sisters, meditate on these words: *Jesus Christ humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.* (cf. Phil 2:8). When St. Paul spoke about our Lord, he did not speak about his penances, his miracles, and all his virtues. Instead, he simply said *he became obedient*; with that he has said everything. In fact, our Lord never spoke one word or did any act of his own volition. He depended entirely on his heavenly Father. Listen also to what our Lord said: *The Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his Father doing: for what he does, his Son will do also* (cf. Jn 5:19). Later he said to his apostles: *My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me* (cf. Jn 7:16). When people want to keep him in Samaria where he had been for three days, he answered: *I have not been sent to stay here; to the other towns I must also go, because for this purpose I have been sent* (See Lk 4:43); and he did not stay even one hour longer. What is said of our Lord during thirty years? *He was obedient to them* (cf. Lk 2:51), nothing more. Jesus Christ coming into the world offered himself to the Father to do his will.

Some people imagine that our Lord was free to escape death, but that is not true at all. Since our Lord **had offered himself to his Father to do his will**, he was no longer free. See him in the Garden of Olives: his soul is in sorrow at the sight of sufferings and death; in agony he cried out: *My Father, let this cup pass from me*, but he immediately added: *yet, not as I will, but as you will* (cf. Mt 26:39,42).

This is obedience, my Sisters, become women of obedience. You must be God's possession, receiving from our Lord and from his will all the movement and life of your actions. Religious life consists in obedience. This is so true that in many orders, like the Carthusians, the most perfect order, obedience is the only vow. In fact, the other vows are contained in this one. The vow of poverty binds the will and the desire to possess; the vow of chastity binds the senses; but the vow of obedience takes hold of the entire soul. All the other virtues are praised; this one is crowned.

There are three kinds of obedience: internal, external, and extraordinary. Internal obedience consists in being internally² disposed of heart to follow all orders given; external, consists in doing the act of obedience promptly, at the time and in the manner prescribed. Obedience is only to God, never to man. One who obeys for motives of self interest, such as praise or reward, would be a cheap mercenary. Only God deserves our obedience. Let us not debase ourselves by obeying one in authority; obedience is directed to God alone. Heart, will, mind, and senses must be completely subject to him. To serve God is to reign, to be royal. We no longer depend on creatures, but on God alone; thus obedience becomes divine. Obedience is the most sublime act of love. It directs all our actions and becomes a life; and we become one with Jesus Christ.

Observe the enormous ships that travel at various speeds according to the power that moves them. Well, we can also measure our obedience according to the power of our love. Obedience is our glory, the glory of all the saints. What was it that lifted up great saints like St. Francis of Assisi, and others? They all practiced poverty and penance, but it was obedience to God that uplifted them.

¹ Number 66. *L'obéissance intérieure, extérieure, extraordinaire, joyeuse.*

² Ravanat, variant: *disposé entièrement* (completely disposed).

A military general achieves a victory only because he was obeyed. We give more glory to God by obeying a superior or a director, than by obeying God directly. Obedience to God through a superior is the best kind. Obey them with joy, says the Lord. St. Peter and St. Paul say in their letters: *Obey from the heart with joy* (See 1 Pt 2:18; Col 3:23). Furthermore, it is the law of the Church that all priests and bishops owe obedience to the sovereign Pontiff. Why this submission? So that men can practice obedience. If we had only a spiritual commandment, where would be our merit? If we obey only the interior voice of God, what guarantee do we have of being right? None. We would have to rely on ourselves. Protestants do this; it can lead to self deception. Who can assure you that this is an angel of light or the devil? This would lead to constant uncertainty.

Obedience destroys pride and self-love. Obedience is perfect humility. It is also the shortest and surest way to attain our purpose directly. It is the easiest – what is easier than doing what we are told to do without examining whether it is good or not. It is the happiest – are we not happy to live and walk along without the worries of responsibility, with the assurance of doing the will of God? Yes, this is the royal and dignified road. To be always under divine authority is a very big grace. Left to ourselves, we can be fooled by self-love, because we are always subject to the action of the devil. This grace of obedience is often missing in the lives of devout persons in the world. Few directors guide souls in this way, since they have no time to do this intently.

Only obedience guides the soul in a reliable way. It has three qualities:

1° Internal means submission of the mind, of the heart, and of the will to the will of God. This is a requirement for all Christians. Religious obedience, however, includes more. It is also affectionate – besides obeying God with our mind, heart, and will, we do so joyfully out of love every day.

2° External. This means doing what has been requested, as perfectly as possible, at the time and in the manner indicated. When you receive an order, you can say: This is what Jesus Christ told me. Then you will do it as coming from him. That thought will inspire you to act with happiness and joy. Obedience is an act of perfect love, an act of obedience glorifies God more than the practice of all the other virtues. Apply yourself then to obedience. The life of obedience expresses love.

3° Obedience, channel of the delegation from God, is what you should prefer to all others. Obedience given to the least important person gives more glory to God than obedience given to the highest authority. In the Sacred Scriptures, God said: *I will bless this people, and as proof, I will give them a child to be their king* (See Is 7:14). We would be very miserable if we obeyed only as to the creature. If possible, it should be sufficient to merely hear the voice of the superior without seeing him. In the old law, when Moses spoke, he covered his face and the people obeyed without seeing him. In the desert, God sent not an angel, but a column to guide and lead them. They obeyed the least movement of the column as to God himself, because it was God who had given it to them as their guide. Your obedience must be like that. Accept the order without seeing from whom or by whom it comes, since it is always the voice of God.

Thank God for giving you the grace of living under obedience. Sincerely ask our Lord for the spirit of this virtue, the faith of obedience in mind, in heart, and in will. Complete obedience, that is, in all things; perfect obedience, that is, acting with joy and love. Obedience is the daily food of religious life. The world finds this foolish, but it is wisdom itself, since God himself commands and we would be foolish to refuse to obey.



Points for reflection:

Take note of the biblical texts: meditate on them. Describe each of the three kinds of obedience.