

03. Obedience and Love



John of the Cross on Obedience

‘Where you are free from whatever is not conformed to God’s will, you rest transformed in God through love’(Ascent II.5.3).

‘I occupy my soul and all my energy in God’s service’(Canticle Stanza 28)

‘The union of love of God is an habitual and loving attentiveness to the will of God’(Spiritual Canticle 28.10).

‘What does it profit you to give God one thing if He asks another of you? Consider what it is that God wants, and then do it. You will as a result better satisfy your heart than with whatever it is towards which you yourself are inclined’(Sayings of light and love 70).

Obedient

Latin

obediens

ob – right up against

Audiens - **‘listening’**

Greek

‘υπακουω hypakouô

hypo - under

akouô - **listening**

Hebrew

שָׁמַע shamâ‘

listening

heeding

obeying

Revelation 3:20

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;
if you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you
and eat with you, and you with me.

Jesus' obedience

'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work'(John 4:34).

'I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me'(John 5:30).

'The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him'(John 8:28-29).

Mary's obedience



‘Let what You have said be done to me.’

‘Blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her
by the Lord would be fulfilled.’

‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,”
will enter the kingdom of heaven,
but only the one
who does the will of my Father in heaven’(Matthew 7:21).

‘Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven
is my brother and sister and mother’(Matthew 12:49-50).

Pedro Arrupé SJ

‘More than ever, I now find myself in the hands of God.
This is what I have wanted all my life, from my youth.
And this is still what I want.

But now there is a difference:
the initiative is entirely with God.

It is indeed a profound spiritual experience
to know and feel myself so totally in his hands,
in the hands of this God
who has taken hold of me.’

Obedience from the heart

God does not want us to obey blindly or automatically, without engaging our heart. God's will is discovered in the circumstances of our lives, but always invites a response from the heart. This is what we mean by conscience: an attentive listening to the movements of our heart that are inspired by God. If we are attentive to our heart and listen to the directions of God that are picked up by our conscience, and if we humbly and faithfully respond from our heart to these inspirations, we are promised a special blessedness.

Listening to others

‘God is so content that the rule and direction of human beings be through other human beings, and that we be governed by human reason, that God definitely does not want us to bestow entire credence upon supernatural communications, or be confirmed in their strength and security, until they pass through the human channel of the mouth of another human being. As often as God reveals something, God confers upon the soul a kind of inclination to manifest this to someone appropriate. Until this is done, we usually go without complete satisfaction, for it is not received from another person like ourselves.’ (John of the Cross Ascent II.22.9)

On the road to Damascus, Paul asked Jesus: ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ (Acts 22:10). Jesus told him to go to Damascus and he would be told.

Spiritual Direction

Being a soul-companion for another person is a delicate art. People are as diverse as flowers and God has mysterious ways of leading each one into communion. If someone has entrusted the care of their soul to you, you should act towards them out of spiritual love: a love that is free of self-interest, seeking only their spiritual good.

Spiritual Direction

If we are to be helped by a soul-companion, we will need to have faith that God is working in and through them. We need to be simple and straightforward, revealing the state of our soul as we see it. How can the director, confessor or soul-companion be an instrument of the Physician of our soul if we are not honest or are selective in what we choose to reveal? If we have chosen to open our heart in trust to a spiritual guide with whom our soul feels at home, God will not let us down if we humbly listen to the words that come to us through the one to whom we are opening our soul. As we listen to his or her words, let us listen to the echo of those words, the echo that arises in our heart. If we are humble, honest and prayerful, the Spirit of him who loves us will use the director's response to guide us, and will enlighten us as to which words we are to follow.

Why Obedience can be difficult

- The cult of the individual
- Relativism
 - Focus on externals
- Seeking immediate gratification
- Setting our hopes on what appears to be for our own benefit
- Wanting to avoid suffering
- Fear of what might threaten our well-being.

John of the Cross on Love for others

‘At the evening of life, you will be examined in love’(Sayings of light and love 57).

‘God knows what is suitable for us and arranges things for our good. Think nothing else but that God ordains all, and where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love’(Letter 6th July 1591).

Saint Therese of Lisieux wrote out the following words of Saint John of the Cross and kept them in her missal:

‘The more you remember your friend, the more you remember the love of God and the greater your desire to love him’(Dark Night I.4.7).

John 15:15

‘I have called you friends ...

John 14:21

The one who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and if you love me you will be loved by my Father, and I will love you and reveal myself to you ...

John 15:12

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.’

The love of friends

We experience a natural attraction towards the way a friend thinks: finding joy in his or her attitudes, reactions and conversation.

Friendship includes a sensual element, for part of friendship is the joy we experience in the company of the other person.

In a friendship that comes from grace there is a harmony of all the vital energies engaged in mutual love - a harmony directed by grace.

The love of friends

If our feelings are deeply engaged over things that are of little importance, or if our so-called friendship excludes others and leads us to cut them out of ordinary respect and love, we are not dealing with a graced friendship.

If, on the other hand, the mutual love draws us out to others and into a deeper prayer, these are signs that the friendship is indeed of the Spirit.

Our commitment to prayer is a commitment to an inner journey towards the Lover who dwells in our heart, towards ever deeper communion with God who made us in his likeness and for whom our hearts long. This same God is at the heart of everything that exists. In drawing us to himself, God is drawing us to the heart of all that he has made. We are never meant to journey alone, not even a person called to the solitary life of a hermit. We are called to be part of the Body of Christ, the communion of saints. Let us be open in love to all those whom providence has given us as companions, and may our sharing of the Spirit enrich us all as together we draw nearer to the source of all life and all love.

Jesus & Peter : John 21:15-17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love [agapan] me more than these?” He said to him, “Lord; you know that I love [philein] you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

A second time Jesus asked, “Simon son of John, do you love [agapan] me?” He said to him, “Lord; you know that I love [philein] you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

Jesus said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love [philein] me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love [philein] me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love [philein] you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

Paul : 1Corinthians 13:4-8

John of the Cross quotes this text in his commentary on the 13th stanza of the Spiritual Canticle (13.12).

Love never stops caring; love always acts in a kind way.

Love does not act out of jealousy or envy;

love does not boast; or behave arrogantly;

love does not behave indecently or insist on its own way;

love does not give way to irritation; or brood over wrongs;

love takes no pleasure in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Love has space enough to hold and to bear everything and everyone.

Love believes all things, hopes all things, and endures whatever comes.

Love does not come to an end.