

Authentic Faith, Obedient Love

To Walk Humbly With the Lord

We all know that Scripture teaches that faith without works is dead. In order for our faith to be alive and authentic, our deeds must match our words and our words must be of God. Let's contrast the virtues of humility and obedience on the one hand to the sins of pride and disobedience on the other.

The virtues are the way of righteousness and lead to eternal life, while unrepentant sin results in death and excludes one from the Kingdom of God. The prophet Ezekiel warns that when a virtuous person turns away from virtue and commits iniquity, death is sure to follow, but when the wicked turn from sin to do what is right, that person preserves his life (Ezekiel 18:25-28). What we do matters.

In the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32), Jesus teaches us that simply saying the right words in an attempt to gain favor without backing them up with good works is both hypocritical and prideful disobedience.

The disobedient elder son spoke the right words, but his deeds did not match them. He represents Israel, particularly those scribes and Pharisees who gave a good show of pious observance of their religion, but who were interiorly prideful, self-centered and disobedient. When faced with the truth proclaimed by John the Baptist, they clung to self instead of humbly submitting themselves to their God.

The other son repented of his sinful words and obeyed his father, thus humbly doing the father's will in the end. He represents all who repent and walk humbly with the Lord to do the right thing.

The Sin of Pride is Alive and Well

If we honestly think about it, can we not see many examples of the prideful disobedience of the elder son all around us in our day?

There is the scandal of Catholics who publicly dissent from the teachings of the Church. And make no mistake, this dissent is a rejection of Christ Himself and of the Father Who sent Him.

Then there is the scandal committed when we say we believe and obey, but in truth act and do otherwise. We may even attempt to rationalize our sin by appealing to an authority other than God and His Church or by treating our faith as a private matter.

One example would be to profess we are personally opposed to abortion but then argue that this belief has no place in the public square. This is especially scandalous when public servants tell you that they are "ardent and faithful" Catholics and then act to promote the killing of the unborn and even try to deceive you about the Church's clear and unchanging teaching that abortion is always a great evil and an injustice.

And there are many other examples. Here are only a few.

- Do we claim to be Catholic but seldom if ever worship at Mass or seek forgiveness in the confessional?

- Do we spend more time and resource pursuing our career than deepening our prayer life?
- Do we expend great effort to acquire material possessions yet do so very little to bring justice and comfort to those less fortunate?
- Do we drive our children to academic and athletic excellence but neglect their spiritual training?

My friends, pride is at the root of all these disordered acts.

Humility, the Antidote to Pride

Jesus chose to bring about our redemption in a way that teaches us the right practice of our faith and the way of life. He revealed by how He lived that the antidote to pride is humility. In St. Paul's letter to the Philippians (Philippians 2:1-5), we witness the great kenosis of the Lord, His voluntary, self-emptying of His reliance on His Divinity. He humbled Himself to accept death, even the humiliation of death on the Cross... all because of His love for the Father and for us.

And that is our lesson. We must seek humility. Like Jesus, we must become obedience itself. If we say we are Catholic, but do not back up our pious words with right living, is it any wonder we do not find fervor and joy in our faith? A true and humble faith is always a joyful faith, no matter what hardships we face.

The "teachings of the Church are not arbitrary and they are not merely man-made rules and ideas. They originate in God. He has given them to the Church. It is out of love for Him that we should obey. We should embrace these teachings and integrate them into our whole life, not because we have to, but because we want to, because we love God.

Looked upon in this way, these teachings free us to be who God created us to be. This is the way to freedom, joy and eternal life.

Woodstock Business Conference – Faith Acting in Love

Just over a year ago two parishioners at St. Peter Chanel Catholic Church in Roswell, Georgia, motivated by their love of God, formed the Atlanta Chapter of the Woodstock Business Conference out of Georgetown University. I am humbled and honored to be both a member of and serve as chaplain and spiritual advisor to this group. The Chapter is comprised of 20 Catholic business leaders from across Atlanta who meet monthly at St Peter Chanel. The objective of the conference is to bring Catholic moral and social teachings and ethics into American corporate practices.

One might ask what is it that we do to pursue this objective. First, each member seeks personal conversion and holiness. After all, one cannot give what he does not possess. So this first step is both key and ongoing.

Second, the members, using real circumstances, both general and particular, discuss how to guide their business decisions with their faith. We are there to support and encourage one another as we try to do the right thing

Many questions are explored. Are employees and customers treated with the same respect and commitment as are the shareholders? Shareholders have a right to expect a reasonable profit on their investment. Workers have a right to a just wage and fair treatment. Customers and clients have a right to quality goods and services at a fair price. All have a right to be treated with honesty and integrity. And even those who are not directly associated with the business have a right to expect that the company will not harm the common good. All sinful business practices must be excluded. How best can we identify and eliminate them?

This is no small thing... imagine if those financial institutions which are presently failing and creating our country's financial crisis had been guided by our Church's teachings.

I have been humbled by the example of personal conversion and commitment to the Lord manifested by the members of this local chapter. Their's is just one example of how to put faith into action.

Humbly Seeking Personal Conversion – The Right Strategy

The truth is that, each of us has sinned, I have and so have you. That's a given. So to find our own ways to put faith into action we must begin with our personal conversion and acknowledge it to be a life-long journey. We all need to continually seek to walk humbly in the Lord.

Let me ask you to do the following in the coming week. First, I ask you to examine your conscience. Pray to the good God for the virtue of humility to honestly identify where your deeds do not match your words and also where your beliefs do not match the Church's teachings. God will show the honest seeker what must be changed. Then, motivated by love for God and one another, repent, firmly resolve to sin no more and make a good sacramental confession.

This excerpt from the Universal Prayer of Pope Clement XI seems very appropriate to this endeavor.

[Lord God] I adore You as my first beginning, I long for You as my final end. I praise You as my constant helper, and call on You as my loving protector. Guide me by Your Wisdom, correct me with Your Justice, comfort me with Your Mercy, protect me by Your Power... Lord, enlighten my understanding, enflame my will, purify my heart, sanctify my soul. Help me to repent of my past sins and to rise above my human weaknesses and to grow stronger as a Christian...

Amen and Amen!

Readings for Mass

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32