

Today we celebrate the feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. It represents 40 days since Christmas. The Presentation is the Fourth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary. In my own childhood, I remember the Mysteries of the Rosary each being attached to a particular virtue.

The Joyful Mysteries, and their particular virtues are as follows:

1. Annunciation - For the love of humility
2. Visitation - For charity towards my neighbor
3. Nativity - For the spirit of poverty
4. Presentation - For the virtue of obedience
5. Finding - For the virtue of piety

Obedience is often seen as a “dirty word” at least in the eyes of our contemporary society. I remember a young man who wanted to be a seminarian; who when asked to do his chores, said he didn’t want to - and that he didn’t particularly like his superior. When asked to fulfill them out of obedience, he floated the red herring that “the Nazi’s made soldiers kill innocents by telling them they had to be obedient.”

It’s always the extreme case, isn’t it? How many people run away from the infinite graces of the Sacrament of Reconciliation because they have already absolved themselves with the line “Well, I didn’t kill anybody ...”

Nonetheless, after acknowledging this historical observation on the part of the young man, he was assured that if “killing innocent people” were to appear on the list of household duties he could most certainly not feel obliged to do so without any moral reservation. However, since murdering innocents was not one of the household chores, he was told

to proceed ... with moral certitude ... to take out the trash, weed the flower beds around the house, and water the lawn.

Father John A. Hardon - of pious memory, and a Jesuit of much acclaim - defines “obedience” in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary* as:

*The moral virtue that inclines the will to comply with the will of another who has the right to command. Material obedience is merely to carry out the physical action commanded; formal obedience is to perform an action precisely because it is commanded by a legitimate superior. The extent of obedience is as wide as the authority of the person who commands. Thus obedience to God is without limit, whereas obedience to human beings is limited by higher laws that must not be transgressed, and by the competency or authority of the one who gives the orders. As a virtue, it is pleasing to God because it means the sacrifice of one’s will out of love for God.*

The final line is key here: Obedience is *pleasing to God because it means the sacrifice of one’s will out of love for God.*

In the Lord’s prayer, we pray to God, “Thy Will be done” ... yet often we mean “my will be done” so long as God’s Will intersects with our own will.

Obedience, as a moral virtue, carries with it two important things - (1) the proper authority of the person who commands, and (2) the limitation of that command not transgressing higher laws. Thus, in the second case, the atrocities carried out by the Third Reich during the Second

World War most certainly violated the Divine Law, and as such exceeded the limits of proper authority.

In the first case, it is important that we recognize the “proper authority of the person who commands.” I am reminded of the year 1995 - when Blessed Pope John Paul II issued *Evangelium Vitae* - reaffirming the teachings of his predecessors (i) Venerable Pope Paul VI in his own encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, and (ii) Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Casti Connubi*.

While not going into the details, I will only point out that in one particular workplace - and I would assume this wasn't an isolated situation - many Catholics, who were living outside of the dictates of these encyclicals, sought high and low and far and wide for a priest - any priest - who would tell them that it was OK to ignore the clear teachings of the Church. Too often, people do things because “father said” or “sister said” or some other so-called authority said ... that the Church was wrong.

That is a clear violation of authority - where someone without authority assumes it on their own; or where people cling to a false authority in an effort to justify their mis-actions and outright sins.

Obedience doesn't mean we have to like what we are asked to do, nor does it mean we have to like the person who asks us to do it. But, if that person possesses the proper authority; and if they are not asking us to transgress a higher law - then we are obliged to obey.

Our Lord was obedient to God the Father - from the simple tasks fulfilled in the Temple ceremonies that we hear of in

today's Gospel ... all the way to His death on the Cross - which is alluded to in the Second Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

Our own call to obedience - under the proper authority, and within the bounds of higher laws - is always an exercise in humility; and is always an opportunity to sacrifice our own will. And as such, it always draws us deeper into the Life of the Trinity, and frees us from confusion regarding what is to be done. And sacrifice done out of love for God - sounds like something Our Lady has asked of us in her messages at Fatima.

When we begin to fray the edges of who or what is the proper authority ... and when we fray the edges of what is or is not covered by higher laws and Divine law - we may gain what appears to be freedom - but this is not freedom ... but rather slavery - that is, slavery to sin.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray for an increase in all the virtues - both Theological and Natural ... but especially the virtue of obedience. Let us also pray for clarity and enlightenment - so that we might recognize those in proper authority, as well as the limits of that authority - as we strive to exercise the virtue of obedience ... out of Love for God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.