



# *Apostles for Today*

*Reflection and Prayer - July, 2007*

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## **Fundamental Rule 20 – Perfect Obedience and Submission**

Our monthly reflection continues to be oriented by the 33 points of the Fundamental Rule which St. Vincent Pallotti left to us. This month we come to point 20 which speaks to us of Jesus' obedience.

*"Our Lord Jesus Christ, having been found in the temple by Mary and Joseph, returned with them to Nazareth, where He lived until he was thirty, the Gospel says of Him, "He was obedient to them", (Lk. 2,50). He was obedient and subject to Mary and Joseph while He practised virtue in a life hidden from the world, thus preparing Himself for the preaching of the Gospel for our instruction and salvation (Rm. 15,4).*

*For love of our Lord Jesus Christ, for our greater sanctification and to prepare ourselves through the hidden life for every kind of apostolic work, and to enable ourselves to maintain and grow in holiness and perfection we must strive to live in the most perfect obedience and submission. Perfect obedience must be:*

*(1) Christian and religious; (2) Universal; (3) Indiscriminate; (4) Exact and complete; (5) Prompt; (6) Blind; (7) Simple; (8) Humble and respectful; (9) Cordial and affectionate (Phil. 2.8).*

*In order to practise until death perfect obedience and submission with all the qualities enumerated, we must cultivate the spirit of obedience and submission not only to superiors, and our fellow members, but also to those outside of every rank, state, and condition, in so far as it is not against the law of God, of the Church, and our Holy Rules and constitutions. This is necessary for more effective cooperation in the various efforts undertaken for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls." OCCC III, p. 71-2.*

## **Introduction**

Every faithful Jew, including Jesus, had a heart-felt commitment to respond to “*Shema*,” to first “listen” and then obey God’s will by responding completely. Christians will recognize this prayerful universal call: “*Listen* Israel: Yahweh our God is the one Yahweh. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.” (Deut 6: 4-5)

## **Saint Vincent Pallotti’s Teaching on Obedience**

Vincent Pallotti modelled his life on Jesus, whom he saw as having responded to God’s will completely, with heart, soul and all his strength. In his foundational documents, the daily Memorandum and Rules, Father Pallotti encouraged his disciples to give priority to daily reflection on and imitation of Christ. Vincent’s twentieth rule called to mind the example of Jesus as a twelve year old, who, when Joseph and Mary discovered him in the Temple of Jerusalem, submissively returned home and “was obedient to them.” (Luke 2:50)

In this spirit, Vincent encouraged all his followers to hear God’s call in the word of superiors, whether religious or lay, and to be prompt, complete, blind, simple, respectful and affectionate in obeying.

“This is necessary for more effective cooperation in the various efforts undertaken for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.” OCCC III, p. 50. Here again Vincent cites the example of Jesus “who was obedient unto death, even unto death on a cross.” (Phil. 2,8)

## **A Reflection on Vincent’s Teaching**

Actions speak louder than words, and the two together give us a portrait of greater clarity than either of the two in isolation. When viewed synoptically, or side by side, actions and words help us recognize nuances that otherwise we might overlook.

Consider, for example, Luke’s story of the obedient 12-year-old Jesus and notice the tension. Jesus had disappeared for three days, hardly an act of filial compliance to his parents’ intentions. Luke noted that in the temple, Jesus had been listening intently to the doctors. When Joseph and Mary found and questioned Jesus, can one detect a slight rebuke in his response:

‘Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?’ What would happen if you disappeared for 3 days and then offered that line as an explanation to your local religious superior or employer?

In Vincent’s life as with Jesus’ life, we can recognize in his actions several levels of meaning. On the one hand we see Vincent’s extraordinary generosity in his continually giving away his personal clothing. He did this from his childhood days until his last fateful winter when he gave his cloak to a penitent and then caught a cold which contributed to his death. These charitable actions were, no doubt, contrary to the admonitions of his family and friends. Vincent’s intentions and actions, like our own, are not necessarily gifted with infallibility. On the other hand, when he believed his mission was wrongfully undercut by some religious authorities, he was not submissive but petitioned the broader community of the religious leaders in Rome. With their discernment and signatures, he succeeded in establishing the validity of his unique pastoral mission. So sometimes Vincent complied with authority figures. Other times he did not and instead, appealed to a higher authority, whether God’s will or Church authorities. Life is rarely simple and without ambiguity.

Perhaps it is with this complexity in mind that one community of Benedictine monks portrayed their understanding of the vow of obedience. Just a little south of Rome, high on a crest, stands the Abbey of Monte Cassino. Here, in 529 A.D., St. Benedict, the founder of one of history’s most prolific religious orders, established what is called the “cradle of Benedictine spirituality.” Here is where he lived the majority of his years and also where he died. This Benedictine Abbey’s cathedral is filled with paintings that express the Order’s spiritual insights. In one painting, high on a pillar, an artist portrayed the significance of the Benedictine promise of obedience. It shows a robed young woman, standing in perfect attention, with hand cocked to ear, listening with complete presence of mind, heart and strength. This painting reminds us of Isaiah’s words: “The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear . . . . So, too, I set my face like flint . . . .”( 50: 4,7) But to what is the woman listening: to religious superiors, to God’s voice within the community, to God whispering in her heart or imagination? Our religious formation stems from many sources: personal relationships, biblical inspirations, creation

and “sacraments” very broadly understood. Which areas are more nurturing for you?

### **For Prayerful Reflection on Your Experience of Obedience**

- ❑ When you were an adolescent, to what extent did your family or parents encourage you to follow authority blindly? What authority did they highlight: themselves, the Church, teachers, your conscience?
- ❑ If you were to consider obedience as listening to God’s voice, which are the sources for that voice in which you have a sense of confidence?
- ❑ During your lifetime, who or what have been the forces encouraging you to develop your own internal guidance system, your sense of self-direction?
- ❑ To what extent do you hear the voice of God speaking to you through questions that surface in your mind or imagination?
- ❑ What are the places, situations or communities where you find it is relatively easy to hear God’s voice for your life? Which are the difficult situations?
- ❑ Who are the people who help you discern what God is saying to you?
- ❑ Once you have discerned God’s voice, how do you usually respond?
- ❑ What are some areas in your life where your passion is strongest?
- ❑ Based on how you use your time, which concerns more fully capture your mind, heart and strength? To what extent are these the priorities to which you want to be committed? What changes, if any, do you want to make?

As a concluding prayer, and consistent with the disciples’ sharing in the Upper Room, consider sharing with others your responses to the above questions.

Here is a link for the Benedictine portrait of Obedience:

[http://www.officine.it/montecassino/disegni/foto\\_hm/obbedien.htm](http://www.officine.it/montecassino/disegni/foto_hm/obbedien.htm)