

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 30, 2019

“The last word, when all is heard: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man’s all.”
(Ecclesiastes 12:13)

In his spiritual work “Abandonment to Divine Providence”, the French Jesuit priest, Father Jean Pierre de Caussade wrote this sentence: *“In reality sanctity can be reduced to one single practice, fidelity to the duties appointed by God.”* All of our readings this weekend focus on this reality of faithfulness (or obedience) and its relation to holiness. For the purpose of this teaching, I will use faithfulness and obedience as being connected one to the other. We can grow in varying degrees of holiness equal to our level of faithfulness/obedience in what God demands. I am faithful, because I am holy; I am holy, because I am faithful.

I am aware many have heard the question - “How little can an individual perform and still reap the benefits?” This minimalistic idea can often prove fatal in the growth of one’s spiritual life. God does not want a half-hearted, somewhat agreeable shoulder shrug of acceptance from us. He requires that we be fully obedient to all that He, His Church, or our own vocation (single, married, ordained) demands of us. However, God neither expects nor requires something from us (faithfulness/obedience) which He Himself does not give us the ability to attain. Again, God will never demand something of us which is greater than our ability to fulfill. Because God wants us to become holy, He has provided two means of attaining holiness through faithfulness: active and passive obedience.

Active obedience entails the fulfillment of our duties toward God, His Church, and our own personal vocation in life (single, married, ordained). One might wonder if they have the necessary strength to fulfill these duties. The answer to this doubt is a resounding Yes. As I stated previously, God will never require something from us that we cannot uphold. A duty (law) of God, His Church, or our vocation ceases to hold sway over us when we no longer have the power or ability to sustain the demand. A simple example to help our understanding is: Are we still required to fast for one hour before receiving holy communion when our health dictates the need to take certain medications requiring food? No. If you need to eat food to take certain medications, then by all means eat away. With the number of Masses offered around the city of Mobile, one could reasonably assume that food could be eaten, medicine could be taken, and we would still find a Mass offered in one of the many parishes allowing for the one hour fast. This may not always be the case if, due to location, there are no other parishes and Masses. Now, what if a person learns of the one hour fast realizing they had never heard this before. Have they unintentionally committed an offense against obedience? No. Active obedience requires a choice and one cannot make a choice if they do not know the requirements given by God or His Church. God will not unfairly judge one of His children and find them guilty of an offense they never intended to commit.

Passive obedience, I would suggest, is the more difficult of the two for it involves our willingness to accept all things which come to us from the hand of God. I find the best explanation for this form of obedience can be found in the Old Testament book of Job. Job asks his wife this question: *“We accept good things from God; and should we not accept evil?”* (Job 2:10) We must be faithful to God praising His name in all of life’s situations. Why? Because, He is, was, and always will be faithful to His promise to be with us, loving us no matter what may happen during our lives.