

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time | For Sunday, December 22, 2019

The Obedience of Faith

Written by Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.

Isaiah 7:10-14

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24



The Gospels do not relate a single word of Joseph, the husband of Mary. He is a silent, loving figure standing in the shadows during the season of Advent, coming into view only in the final days of this season of watching and waiting.

Although our Catholic tradition has often referred to Joseph as the “just” or “righteous man” (cf. Matthew 1:19), the story related in the [Gospel for this Fourth Sunday of Advent](#) presents a different facet of Joseph’s character: obedience.

Taken from the Latin words *ob* and *audire*, our English word “obedience” means to *listen* or to *hear*. But this sense of listening doesn’t mean that we simply take in and then follow the commands of another person. Obedience like that shown by St. Joseph is a deeper sort of awareness and intentionality. Joseph listened, yes, but he listened *with his heart*. This is the kind of obedience that we Christians are called to in our relationship with God and with one another.

To say it another way, to be obedient as a Christian is to say, “I love you so much and am so in tune with your needs and desires that words are unnecessary.” To get a sense of this, think of married couples who have been together for several years and who can anticipate each other’s needs or of a parent who knows what their child is feeling without any words ever having been spoken. Obedience, in its truest sense, isn’t about submission to the will of another. Obedience is about relationships.

As we have journeyed through the season of Advent, we’ve heard promises from prophets and priests. We have received admonitions from St. Paul, urging us to be patient and to hope. More than that, Jesus has reminded that he will come again in judgment and power in the fullness of time to bring about the full realization of the reign of

God. These have been days of hope, expectation, waiting, perseverance, and, yes, obedience. Because, like Joseph and Mary who said “yes” to what was asked of them, God has also been asking something of us in these Advent days. And what is it God is asking for? The obedience of faith (cf. Romans 1:5).

[In a 1966 reflection](#), Dorothy Day wrote:

Faith is required when we speak of obedience. Faith in a God who created us, a God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Faith in a God to whom we owe obedience for the very reason that we have been endowed with freedom to obey or disobey. Love, Beauty, Truth, all the attributes of God which we see reflected about us in creatures, in the very works of man himself whether it is bridges or symphonies wrought by his hands, fill our hearts with such wonder and gratitude that we cannot help but obey and worship.

Ultimately, our Advent journey has been a time of discipleship. We are being asked to trust that God has kept — and continues to keep — the promises made to our spiritual ancestors so many centuries ago. And part of this trust is our awareness of how Christ is present and active among us today.

As we enter into this final week of Advent, ask St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin to help you cultivate a spirit of humble obedience so that you are able to discern what it is God is asking of you in these holy days. Offer a prayer of thanks for the ways that you experience the presence and power of Emmanuel — God with Us.

Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.

PRAYER

O God, who, fulfilling the promise made to our Fathers,
chose the Blessed Virgin Mary,
the noble daughter of Zion,
grant that we may follow her example,
for her humility was pleasing to you
and her obedience profitable for us.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

— (Collect from the Mass of the “Blessed Virgin Mary, Chosen Daughter of Israel” from “The Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary”)