

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 27, 2020

Embracing Obedience

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Philippians 2:1-11 or 2:1-5

Matthew 21:28-32



Grumbling. That nagging inner monologue that no one else sees. The ongoing commentary that reviews the day's events through a particular lens of our misperception. The unbridled conversation with ourselves that dictates our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. It is the internal revulsion from a certain dissatisfaction with something that does not correspond to our mood at any given time. Sometimes, it is expressed externally through words, gestures or facial expressions; other times, it simmers deep within behind a veneer of elegant composure.

Grumbling happens within me as well, more than I care to admit. And it often comes so subtly that I hardly know that it is happening, and I find myself moody, irritable, and sometimes careless with my work. It is so common in monastic life that the Rule of St. Benedict admonishes against this in several places throughout. The prevalence of grumbling in the Rule — and even in our own personal and spiritual lives — shows us an area of growth well worth embracing: obedience seen as humility.

Obedience is truly difficult today for all of us. It can go against the grain of the “be all that you can be” ethic many of us grew up on. Obedience teaches us that we don't have the final say on most things, save for that which is immoral and contrary to faith. Practicing obedience-as-humility teaches us how to seek to do God's will in every circumstance of our day, instead of our own. The starting point is getting a handle on that wild beast within that grumbles when faced with unpleasing circumstances: a critical customer, a sleepless night, an unforeseen work project requiring hours of additional work with a short deadline, traffic

on the highway while you are already late for the concert, test results from the doctor's office, an ambiguous text message from your child that leaves you rattled and confused, a glaring glance from your spouse at the dinner table, the vitriolic commentary on news stations or social media feeds about current events, the run-around while waiting in the queue at the doctor's office in this new COVID world we live in, etc., etc. The list could go on and on. So, what can we do to gain control of our tendency to grumble? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Breathe deeply even in the middle of the stressful situation. A few deep breaths not only calms your nerves, but helps to gain control over your thoughts.
2. Smile, without being disrespectful, and laugh, whenever possible to lighten the mood. In the midst of difficult situation these help to relieve tension in the air by recognizing it, calling it out, and allowing the Lord to provide an alternative approach.
3. Journal gratitude is a way to recall the Lord's Hand even in the smallest way through the chaos of the day. Either in the morning with your cup of coffee, or in the evening before going to bed, this is helpful to recall the day and see that the Lord was with us even in the storm.
4. Pray into situations beforehand. This is not always possible, but when it is, we can take some time in silence and prayer with the Lord to ask Him to guide us especially in our dealing with difficulties.
5. Speak honorably and gracefully. Our speech does not have to be hijacked by our emotions. We can speak words of grace even when we are flooding with grumbling and negative emotions.

Learning how to become more aware and mindful of our self-talk seems like such a mundane skill, but as we learn to become masters over our thoughts, we can learn that obedience to God's will through humility is an avenue to experience an abiding interior peace that the world cannot give. Imagine maintaining that tranquility of soul throughout the storms of life. It seems impossible, but on the contrary, with much discipline and effort, it indeed is possible to make progress.

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Dear Lord,
this is the day you have made,
so let us rejoice and be glad in it!
Do not allow the enemy to steal our joy!
Father, teach us to be grateful in all
circumstances.
Do not let our hearts become heavy
with resentment and envy.
Amen.