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Chancellor's Update

Proper Subjection is the Path to Eternal Happiness

"And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them; and His mother kept all these things carefully in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men." - Luke 2:51-52

The Gospel for the Feast of the Holy Family ends with these two verses taken from the well-known incident of Our Blessed Lord leaving His family for three days in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph had brought Him there for a ceremony marking His initiation as man in the Jewish culture. Soon after He has completed this ceremony, He withdraws silently from Mary and Joseph, leaving them to fret for a harrowing 72- hours in dire search of Him. His actions exhibit an almost scandalous level of disobedience and disrespect to His earthly parents. At least they do to the superficial reader. However, in century after century, great and holy scholars have harvested tremendous wisdom from this incident

Above all, what is most important in this Gospel passage is the first of the two verses above, which reveals the sublime lesson that Christ had in mind for us. One of the Church Fathers, Geometer, places Christ's actions in this passage squarely in the context of His life:

But three things He especially taught us by example: to love God, to honour our parents, but to place God before our parents. When however He was reprov'd by His parents, He considers other things as of lesser concern than those of God: then in due order He renders obedience to His parents.

The lesson here, then, is stern but precious. We should always be subject to our parents, but we should never forget that *it is God who has instituted this authority* and, as such, He has *first claim* to all our actions. In fact, Our Lord during His public life goes so far as to say that, if the price of faith requires it, He is prepared to see "father against son and son against his father; mother against daughter and daughter against the mother" (Luke 12:53) and so forth. We should also point out that this applies to the other authorities God has placed over us, whether civil or religious. *Butler's Lives of the Saints* is littered with stories of saint after saint who was forced to deny parents or bishop or king to achieve the will of God in their lives.

Fortunately, however, most of us will never have to make these kinds of choices. We will live our lives in plain and proper subjection to all the authorities God has placed over us. Yet, we should not mistake our obedience as something common or ordinary! Because we obey on account of Our Lord, the great writers of the Catechism of Trent highlighted the essential link between the *Fourth* and the *First* Commandments. They wrote:

The advantages arising from the [Fourth Commandment] can scarcely be expressed in words; for not only does it bring with it its own fruit, and that in the richest abundance and of superior excellence, but it also affords a test of our obedience to and observance of the first Commandment. He that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, says St. John, how can he love God whom he seeth not? In like manner, if we do not honour and reverence our parents whom we ought to love next to God and whom we continually see, how can we honour or reverence God, the supreme and best of parents, whom we see not? Hence we can easily perceive the similarity between these two Commandments.

The intertwined nature of these two expressions of obedience is truly, then, one of the greatest gifts that we have received, for our daily subjection to our families is not only a fulfillment of our filial or paternal duty, but also an exercise of faith in Almighty God! In other words, in the seemingly endless monotony of family life, we can take tremendous solace in the fact that every sacrifice taken for the sake of family, no matter how small, is a radical proclamation of faith.

In the spirit of this revelation, we are even more moved to wonder at how much of His life Jesus spent to teach this to us. By simply measuring the amount of time Our Lord chose to spend in filial subjection to Mary and Joseph, we could reasonably induce that Christ really wanted to bring this to our attention, especially considering all the other things He could have done. St. Louis de Monteforte brilliantly exposes this understated lesson of the Gospels in his masterwork, *True Devotion to Mary*:

139. Our good Master stooped to enclose himself in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, a captive but loving slave, and to make himself subject to her for thirty years. As I said earlier, the human mind is bewildered when it reflects seriously upon this conduct of Incarnate Wisdom. He did not choose to give himself in a direct manner to the human race though he could easily have done so. He chose to come through the Virgin Mary. Thus he did not come into the world independently of others in the flower of his manhood, but he came as a frail little child dependent on the care and attention of his Mother. Consumed with the desire to give glory to God, his Father, and save the human race, he saw no better or shorter way to do so than by submitting completely to Mary.

He did this not just for the first eight, ten or fifteen years of his life like other children, but for thirty years. He gave more glory to God, his Father, during all those years of submission and dependence than he would have given by spending them working miracles, preaching far and wide, and converting all mankind. Otherwise he would have done all these things.

Alongside this profound observation, there is an important point to be made. The Almighty God, Jesus Christ, came upon earth and took upon Himself the lowliness of a human nature. And throughout the entirety of His life, He acted with one single motivation: “Behold, I come...to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:7). Contemplate for a moment this fact: that the infinite wisdom of the triune God deigned to pour out the majesty and power and grace of the God-Man, Jesus, into 10,947 days of a quiet life in Nazareth, all the while subject to a *mere human woman*. Keeping this in mind, hear what St. Bernard has to say of these blessed years of Our Lord’s and Mary’s lives:

Who was subject to whom? A God to men. God, I repeat, to Whom the angels are subject: Whom principalities and powers obey: was subject to Mary; and not alone to Mary, but to Joseph also, because of Mary. Admire and revere both the one and the other, and choose which you admire the more: the most sweet condescension of the Son or the sublime dignity of the Mother. For either am I at a loss for words: for both are wondrous. For that God should obey a woman is humility without compare; and that a woman should have rule over God dignity without equal.

What a tremendous consolation to us! In our humiliations and our frustrations being subject to others in our daily lives, we know that Christ was there first. In fact, He saw no more perfect way to glorify His Heavenly Father than by being subject to another, and one who was infinitely less than Himself at that. This is the secret gift of the Christ Child, and the true pearl those wise men in the temple were seeking.

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