

Obedience – Christmas 1 2009

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer:

In reflecting on this morning's Gospel reading, and then on the other readings, I found myself wrestling with the place of obedience in our Christian lives.

The phrases '*I must be in my Father's house*' and that Jesus went with his parents and '*was obedient to them*', led me to go beyond this story to the deeper point highlighted by Paul in Philippians. There we read of Christ that '*being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death*'.

This obedience is fundamental to his calling. It is in obedience that he empties himself and comes amongst us; it is in obedience that he lives a very human life; and it is in obedience he goes to his death. Obedience is the very core of his saving work. We are not saved by his power, or his wisdom. It is loving obedience to his Father's will that turns the trick. Neither fear nor depression, frustration nor anger can affect the effectiveness of his obedience and it is for this obedience, as Paul goes on to say, that God '*gave him the name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend*'.

It is this wonderful loving obedience that so enlivens our hope at this Christmas time. And it is to this same obedience that we are called as his followers and disciples. As Paul says at the beginning of the passage I quoted: '*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*'

How should such obedience to God be expressed in our lives?

I suggest that today's epistle and psalm point to two fundamental ways that this must happen.

Firstly, the psalm. Psalm 148 is a wonderful expression of the praise we each need to give to our Creator, to the one who initiates and sustains this universe. The one in whom we move and have our being. Our very being as creatures calls us, as it does all creatures, to offer worship as we are able.

Hear again what it says:

O praise the Lord from the earth: praise him, you sea-monsters and all deeps;

Fire and hail, mist and snow: and storm wind fulfilling his command;

Mountains and hills: fruit trees and cedars;

Beasts of the wild, and all cattle: creeping things and winged birds;

Kings of the earth and all people; princes and all the rulers of the world;

Young men and maidens: old folk and children together;

Let them praise the name of the Lord:

Had you ever thought how this might happen, how do the trees and the beasts of the wild praise God? In part this must be by being themselves and living as they are called to do. At another level however the universe and all that is in it is called to praise God with one voice, and, in this unity, who is called to provide that voice? We are. We are called by our very being to provide the understanding, loving, voice that all creation needs. When you stand in awe in the beauty of nature, by the sea perhaps or in the mountains, do you praise God, not only on your own behalf but on behalf of all you see? Do you realise that this not an optional extra you might like to do, but perhaps the primary task to which we are all called. To offer the worship of our very being to our Creator in the unity of the created order is to be truly ourselves, to be truly who we are called to be.

While this may sound like some new age greenie propaganda, surprisingly this has been the view of the church from the earliest times and has appeared in our Eucharistic liturgies from early times.

In passing I might ask whether we feel that the way we humans presently live has fulfilled our calling as part of, and the voice of, nature? Have we been true to our fundamental task of worship?

The second task of obedience we are called to fulfil is considered in today's reading from Colossians. Just as worship is our first task, so perfecting and living out loving relationships is our other task. It is worth considering briefly some aspects of this task as summarised by Paul.

Firstly we are to: *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom"*. How do you do this? What books, courses, retreats, have you attended in the past year? How have you used your bible in the past year? What time have set you apart for prayer? What are your plans for this coming year?

Secondly, *"Cloth yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience"*: These should derive from our knowledge of where we stand before God in Christ. They are, however, also a matter of practice. We humans live most of our lives habitually. At first we act by choice but soon we have an ingrained pattern of behaviour which clicks in without thought when a certain situations occur. As Christians we may well see that we need to change some of these habit patterns. Kindness, humility, meekness and patience do not come easily. At least they don't for me. We need to deliberately set about changing bad patterns. What steps do you need to take this year to show improved patterns of behaviour?

Thirdly: *“Forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you”*. We are to actively work to redeem and heal relationships. We are called to be the initiating party, not to stand on our pride: after all what basis do we have for such pride?

Finally, Paul says: *‘Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus’*. When I thought about this one I found it a real challenge. How much of our daily pattern of activities could stand in this light? I do not mean that we go through the day carrying out pious acts, we need to get on with the ordinary things of life. After all it was to sanctify the ordinary things of life that Jesus came. We do however need to ask ourselves in each thing we do: How do they stand in the light of Christ? Selfishness, laziness, fear, and so many other things find their way into our lives. It is a good question to ask ourselves as we work our way through an ordinary day with its tasks, and personal interactions. How, this year, are you going to find what you need to change to live each day *in the name of the Lord Jesus?*

We are then to be perfected in our faith by knowingly setting about the task of change and growth: it does not happen by accident, it does not happen by magic. Obedient training and practice are needed if we are to grow to the fullness of Christ to which we are called. As Paul says: *“let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.”*

So, it seems a long way from the child Jesus seeking to live in his Father’s house, and also to be obedient to his earthly parents, but it is the same journey we all must find a way to make. We are called to be about God’s business with each of us, both in worship and in loving relationships.

The Lord be with you.