

MY FATHER'S HOUSE

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The Evangelical Counsels Part I - Poverty

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Some years ago, Gerald Vann, a popular Catholic spiritual writer, stated that mankind would never return to sanity nor normalcy until it renewed its interest in the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Fr. Vann surveyed the world scene and like most other Christians, he saw the effects of materialism, hedonism and rugged individualism. He clearly saw that men and women were not turning in love and humility toward God and toward each other but rather toward money, sex and power.

In Our Day

What Fr. Vann said 50 years ago could be stated with more emphasis today. As we look around the world, we see the tremendous greed of the first world and the tremendous greed and poverty of the third and fourth worlds. Consumerism now has replaced Jesus, even at Christmas. The rich get rich and the poor get poorer. About one percent of Americans are multibillionaires.

Immorality

In the field of moral purity, most lives are being shattered. Most teenagers today are sexually active. Homosexuality, for countless millions, has become an accepted lifestyle. Public scandals from the president on down fill our newspapers. Newspapers and the media have become an accepted medium for softcore and hardcore pornography. With the advent of the pill, adultery has become so commonplace that the percentage of divorces doubled between 1960 and 1970.

Planned Parenthood now decides what type of sex education will be given to public school children. Contraception and abortion within marriage has even dehumanized wives and mothers. There are now 16 venereal diseases for which there is no known cure, the most famous of which is Aids. Abortion, artificial birth control, premarital sex, adultery, pornography, sodomy are now household words. Talk shows by and large attest to the fact of the tremendous moral decade right in the soul of America. Immorality on the Internet is now fully legal. Immorality and pornography are now mainstream America. Most Americans by far are immoral. Few teens and even fewer adults practice moral purity.

Rebellion and disobedience

America long has been known for its rugged individualism, but now, it has become rampant. Most Americans are more for rights than responsibilities. Our judicial system has

supported this. No longer is this country seen as founded upon the laws of nature and of nature's God as our Founding Fathers declared. No longer do we hold certain truths to be God-given, self-evident and unalienable. Now the Supreme Court has proposed a sweeping redefinition of freedom. When it declared, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe and of the mystery of human life. This of course, is the very antithesis of the Judaic-Christian framework that formed the background of our country. It is the very opposite of the ordered liberty affirmed by our Founding Fathers. Freedom in this debased sense degenerates into license and makes the very possibility of law improbable. For by very definition, every law proposes some objective norm of right and wrong. Our legal system has made matters even worse. Most lawyers do not even take into consideration what is right and wrong. Now morality is defined by what is legal, and what is legal is based upon whim and vested interest. All ten commandments are now legally broken in America.

In the private sphere, the message is that we are to do our own thing – to do it *my way*. This new philosophy of rebellion is idealized in movie, song and media. America has become a rebellious and selfish country. We now ask what America and others can do for us, rather than what we can do for our country and for others, to paraphrase John F. Kennedy.

Many millions of Americans suggest that any ethical morality that transcends vested interest is constitutionally forbidden in the public forum under the ruse of separation of Church and state. America has cut itself lose not only from its moral foundations, but from God. And the only book now generally censored in the United States is the Bible. And the only people excluded officially from teaching in public schools are ministers, priests and rabbis. The only thing excluded from graduation ceremonies and from curriculum is prayer, morality and the Ten Commandments. The American Civil Liberties Union has wrecked havoc in the political and public sphere.

Enter Jesus and Lady Poverty

In the face of all of this enters Jesus and His Gospel. One-fourth of all of His teachings are against materialism, consumerism and the amassing of wealth. Jesus calls all of us to be poor in spirit, as well as humble and pure of heart. He taught that it's harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom, than for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle. He stated that there is a curse upon the rich, and a blessing upon the generous and poor in spirit. He taught us to rely upon the providential help of His Father and to seek His kingdom of righteousness, justice and love. He opened our eyes to see that God and people are more important than money and greed. He stated categorically that it is impossible to serve both God and money. And He showed us by His own example to lay aside everything for the sake of love and His Kingdom.

He extolled poverty of spirit, purity of heart and humble obedience as His antidotes to greed, lust, and rebellion. He also told us to find our riches, our romance, and our submission in Him. He would be for us the pearl of great price, the divine romance, and more. By making Him the pearl of great price, we can become detached from every other thing save Him. By making Him the source and fount of our love, we would be empowered to love everyone with His pure and inspired love. by making Him Lord of our lives, we could become His humble and obedient servants. Our riches, our love and our power we would find in Him.

Part II - Chastity

Our Blessed Lord and Savior has called all of us to a pure love of Him and each other. He has sent us His Spirit, which above all is a spirit of love. He inflames our hearts so that we can love one another as He loves. This very special pure love that Jesus places in our hearts is called agape love. It has a height, depth, length, and breadth that only the spirit of God can create in our hearts. The Height of this love is that it comes from God, it is a gift of His spirit.

Therefore, it is something we have to surrender to, pray for, be nourished with, and be open to. God is love. Only those who abide in God can abide in love. To be into God is to be into real love. This love is nurtured within us primarily by the Eucharist, which is the "love food for our souls." Every time we receive Christ in the Eucharist, we become more and more transformed into His loving presence. There, we become as bread broken for a fallen world. There we are energized to love everyone with His love.

Depth

The depth of this love is that it loves the unlovable and forgives the unforgivable. It reaches the unreachable and touches the untouchable. It even forgives the unforgivable. It empowers us to forgive each and every person who has ever hurt us, even our most bitter enemy.

Breadth

The breadth of this love is that it is truly Catholic – that is, truly universal. It loves everyone regardless of race, creed, or ethnic origin. It loves young and old, rich and poor, it loves men and women. It has a preferential love for the weak, the little, the poor, the outcast, the littlest and the last.

Length

The length of this love is that it lasts forever. It does not give up in the hard times. It has a perseverance about it because it is empowered by God's spirit. Because it does not keep a record of wrongs, there is no end to its forbearance, its power to forgive. It is enduring, and it lasts forever.

God's Real Love

Because God pours this love into our hearts by means of His spirit, it is the only true and real love that there is. Unlike its counterfeit, worldly or carnal love, it seeks the best for the beloved. Like Christ, the attitude of such lovers is *this is my life for you*. Because it is God's own love, it is pure. Because its origin is in the spirit and not in the flesh, it does not use people nor dehumanize them. In the interpersonal and sexual realm, it sees people as people and not as objects. When a man loves a woman with the love of Jesus, she becomes his friend, his trusted, loving, pure, and open friend.

Friendships in the Lord

Christ has given us this ability to have friendships in Him. Real friendships are inspired by the Spirit and nurtured for the sacraments and prayer. In such friendships, one can easily say, "I am committed, no matter what. I love you unconditionally. I'm sorry, I was wrong. I forgive you always." In Christ, friends have found the secret of staying in love. The more open and loving they become, the less they will want to control or use their friend. Fr. Paul Hinnebusch O.P. has written a beautiful book entitled, "Friendship in the Lord" (Ave Maria

Press), and Fr. John Powell has written a classic, "The Secret of Staying in Love" (Argus Communication, 1974).

The Fire of God's Love

The more we are immersed in Christ, the more the Eucharist radiates in our hearts, the more God's Spirit is allowed to work in our spirits, the more we experienced the fire of God's love for everyone. There is an inner sanctum, a holy of holies, in the heart of Christ that saints and other true lovers have entered. The love of these people is said to be inspired and anointed by the spirit. It knows both ecstasy and passion. Such people have discovered that they have loved too little. Christ's love in their hearts creates a real fire, a real fire for intimacy, a real burden for the unsaved, a real zeal for the oppressed, a real urgency to reach out to embrace, to hold, and to risk. This love is like a volcano. Nevertheless, its eruptions are fully under the control of the Holy Spirit. This love is the greatest force that the world has ever known. This love alone can fill all the longings of human hearts. This love is an eternal participation in the very intimate love life of the Trinity itself. This love is so explosive, powerful, and pure that it can overshadow every sin, cleanse every impurity, restore any relationships, and elevate any friendship.

Moral Purity and Purity of Heart

Our physical desires are like nuclear energy. They can be unleashed with devastating destruction or they can be brought under control and thereby bring benefit to multitudes. Scripture warns us to, "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Gal 5:16-17).

What Does It Mean to Have Moral Freedom?

Moral freedom is having your physical drives under the control of the Holy Spirit. Moral freedom is transforming physical drives into spiritual power so that from your inner person will come life-giving benefits to others. "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "streams of living water will flow from within him" (Jn 7:38).

Moral freedom is not the right to do whatever you want; it is the power to do what you ought. It is being strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints the length, the breadth, the height, and the depth of the love of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge, and that you may be filled with God Himself. To our God who is able to give to us infinitely more than anything we can dare dream for, to Him, we give honor and glory fore ever and ever! Amen (cf Eph 3:16-21).

How Did God Design Me So I Could Achieve Moral Freedom?

God designed you with three inward drives – spiritual, psychological and physical – that are listed in order in 1 Thess 5:23: "and may the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He designed the spiritual drive to be the strongest. It is difficult to separate the spirit from the soul, yet Scripture does separate them: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). When you became a

Catholic, God's Spirit was united with your human spirit and God gave you the potential of being mighty in spirit.

What Takes Place in Your Spirit?

Your Spirit is the Home of FAITH. *Faith is not about leaping blindly in the dark; it is discerning what God intends to accomplish in and through your life.*

The first function of faith is to believe in Christ for salvation. The Holy Spirit then takes up residence in your spirit and confirms that you are a Christian. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom 8:16).

Your Spirit is the Home of CONSCIENCE. Your spirit will convict your mind when you are about to do something that is morally wrong. On the other hand, your spirit will give assurances to your mind when you are doing something morally right. Thus, it is in your spirit that your senses are "exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:14).

Disobeying the prompting of the Holy Spirit will cause Him to be grieved and will quench His power in your life.

Your Spirit is the Home of WISDOM. Wisdom is seeing life from God's perspective. As we fill our soul with God's Word our spirit will experience wisdom. "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place" (Ps 51:6).

A wise person is able to identify immorality as foolishness. On the other hand, a simple person is easily led into immorality.

Your Spirit is the Home of CREATIVITY. Creativity is the ability to see a need, a task or an idea from a new perspective. This ability is especially important in finding the way of escape in temptation. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor 10:13).

Your Spirit is the Home of FELLOWSHIP. Fellowship is a function of our spirit with the spirits of others, whereas friendship is a function of our soul. You can have fellowship with other Christians because your spirit is able to communicate with their spirits. "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7).

You can also have fellowship with the Lord because His Spirit dwells in you. "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11).

Moral purity is essential for fellowship because the Spirit of God cannot have fellowship with evil. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Cor 6:14).

Your Spirit is the Home of WORSHIP. True worship is a function of the spirit. "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and truth" (9 Jn 4:24). Worship is destroyed by rejecting the truth of moral standards and thereby grieving the Holy Spirit.

Your Spirit is the Home of DISCERNMENT. Discernment of truth comes by illumination of your spirit by the Holy Spirit. For "God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10).

On the other hand, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). The discernment of wisdom will deliver you from the evil man and from the strong woman (cf Prov 2:12,16).

What Takes Place In Your Soul?

The Greek word for soul is "pseuche"; it is the word from which we get the word "psychology." The soul is the executive part of our being. It receives data from our spiritual senses and our physical senses and develops thoughts, feelings and decisions based upon them.

When your soul makes decisions based on the directives of the spirit, you will be spiritually-minded. If, however, your soul makes decisions based only on the impulses of your flesh, you will be carnally-minded. This will produce moral slavery and death. "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Rom 8:6-8).

In order to be mighty in spirit, you must come to the place of submitting your mind, will and emotions to the control of the Holy Spirit.

What Takes Place In Your Body?

In the same way that your spirit opens up your life to the spiritual world, your physical senses of taste, touch, sight, sound and smell open up your life to the physical world.

God created the physical senses, and as long as they are under the control of the Holy Spirit, they will bring joy and fulfillment to you to those around you.

What is the Ultimate Goal of Moral Freedom?

The goal of the Christian life is to produce the love that springs out of a pure heart, a good conscience and genuine faith (See 1 Tim 1:5). This kind of love is possible only when moral freedom is being experienced in your life. *The essence of genuine love is giving, whereas the essence and goal of lust is getting.* Love can always wait to give, but lust can never wait to get. Genuine love is giving to the basic needs of other people without the motive of personal gain.

How Does Moral Impurity Begin?

God has given normal physical appetites to each of us; however, we are also born with a sin nature. At any time, we can stir up these physical desires apart from the control of the Holy Spirit, and then very quickly, physical appetites will overpower spiritual desires.

The process of improperly stirring up God-given physical desires is called *lasciviousness* (See 2 Cor 12:21 and Gal 5:19). The result is identified in Romans 7:8 and 1 Thessalonians 4:5 as *concupiscence*.

Concupiscence is the condition of the soul in which sensual lusts are stronger than spiritual desires. When the limitations of God-given desires are violated, there is an immediate sense of guilt.

Very often, the person who has the guilt will try to return to the balance of the drives only to discover that this is not possible. Sexual passions do not automatically return to lower levels of intensity.

Solomon explained this problem when he wrote of the consequences of a young man losing his purity in the house of a harlot. "For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life" (Prov 2:18-19).

The consequences are further explained in Proverbs 5:20-23: "Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly."

There is a further problem in the realm of concupiscence: The sensual desires continue to grow. Moral impurity is like a miry pit; the more a man struggles within it, the deeper he sinks into it.

Activities that satisfied before are no longer fulfilling. New forms of sensual pleasure are sought after and the person continues traveling toward the condition of reprobation. A person who is a reprobate is one who has rejected the truth, has seared his conscience, and believes "the lie." The lie is believing that man is god and that sensual pleasure is the ultimate purpose in life.

The delusions and sensual perversions which lead to the lie are described in Romans 1:25-29: Romans 1:25-28: "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen." Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

The Dilemma Of Being Double-Souled

When the conscience is violated with an act of moral impurity, the sensual drives are increased, and the spiritual drives are diminished because the Holy Spirit has been grieved. Now the mind, will and emotions are in the midst of two opposing forces. On the one hand, the soul wants to be spiritual, but on the other hand, the soul wants to be sensual. This double-souled condition is precisely what James defines in his epistle. "...he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does" (Jas 1:6-8).

The world uses the term "schizophrenia" to describe an extreme condition of "double-mindedness." Man's term, however, is meaningless because it gives not a hint of either cause or cure.

If the condition of double-mindedness is allowed to continue, the Holy Spirit will continue to be grieved and spiritual desires will be further diminished. The person in this condition instinctively senses that his spiritual desires should be stronger than his physical drives.

Therefore, he attempts to make up for what is lacking in his spiritual life with religious effort. The tragic result is a pseudo-religious front. On the outside, he appears to have strong spiritual character, but when under pressure, he manifests a carnal nature.

A further condition soon develops within his soul: pseudo-intellectualism. With weak spiritual desires and strong sensual drives, he begins to argue and debate with philosophical ideas which he picks up from others or makes up on his own. Paul warns about these pseudo-intellectuals in Titus 3:10-11. He explains that they are argumentative because they have a moral twist and they know it.

Why Two Christians Might Disagree Over The Same Activity

The further a person progresses toward concupiscence and later reprobation, the less troubled he is about things that used to bother his conscience. Three things combine to bring this about.

First, the Holy Spirit is grieved and, therefore, His power to convict the conscience is quenched. Second, God's Word is rejected and replaced with human reasoning. With human reasoning, there is no sin that cannot be rationalized away. Third, because lusts have a way of being burned out, things that used to bring sensual fulfillment no longer do. Neither do they any longer stir up desires the way they used to.

Based on this, two Christians at different levels on the concupiscence chart could look at the same activity and have totally opposite responses to it. To the one Christian, an activity would be looked at as stirring up sensuality, and therefore wrong for him to engage in. To the Christian who is beyond that point, that activity would not stir up any new lustful desires and, therefore, he would excuse it as "not being a problem."

How Does God "Give Up" a Person To Immorality?

God describes the full gamut of immorality in Romans 1. Three times in that chapter we find the phrase, "God gave them up..." It is important to note that there is no period after the phrase, but rather the word "to". God does not give up on a person who is immoral. He gives him up to the consequences of his own lust.

The nation of Israel "...gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test. so He gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them" (Ps 106:14-15).

In Romans 1, the first mention of God's "giving up a person" is in verse 24. God first explains, in verse 19, that He had written His law in their heart, and that they had the witness of His nature and Godhead from His creation (v.20). But then they refused to glorify Him as God, or be thankful, but became vain in their imaginations (v 21).

After their foolish heart was darkened, they then changed the Holy God into a corruptible god who would allow them to do the things that they wanted to do. "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another" (Rom 1:24).

Uncleanness through lust would involve the first level of sensuality, identified in Scripture as concupiscence. At this first level, God surrenders a person to be the plaything of his own sensual desires.

If this person does not repent, enter into Christ's victory and experience freedom, he will go on to change the truth of God's Word into "the lie." He will then still worship God, but he will worship and serve the creature more than he will the Creator. (See Romans 1:25.) "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts..." (Rom 1:26).

The wages of lust is more lust and the wages of sensuality is destruction through shameful lusts. "Shameful lusts" include sodomy (homosexuality). This vile practice is defined in verses 26 and 27. At this stage, they not only ceased worshipping God, but "since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done' (Rom 1:28).

Therefore, "God gave them over to a depraved mind...Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (Rom 1:28, 32).

A reprobate person is one whose conscience is defiled. He believes that wrong is right and right is wrong. He speaks of freedom, yet he himself is the slave of his own degenerate nature. His mind is void of God's truth and wisdom, yet he supposes himself to be wise as he pursues death. Whatever level you may be on, realize that there is freedom from sin. You are able to experience this freedom by understanding and fully obeying the truth of Scripture. God states, "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jer 32:27). With men, freedom from perverted habits is impossible, "...but not with God; all things are possible with God"

Part III - Obedience

Jesus, who calls us to make Him our treasure and romance, also calls us to make Him our Lord. To make Jesus Lord of your life means that you have to let go of control. You can no longer deliberately do your own thing. You can no longer be an arrogant individualist claiming your own rights. A true Christian gives up every right, except the right to follow the inspirations of Jesus. Jesus said of Himself, "With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this, the Son does nothing on His own, the Son does only what He sees the Father doing" (Jn 5:19). Jesus now and forever was always obedient to the promptings of His Father.

Garden of Eden

In the Garden of Eden, the only virtue that God asked for from Adam and Eve was obedience. God said nothing directly about faith, humility or love because obedience included all of these. The one thing necessary for our first parents to stay in the Garden of Eden and to keep God's covenant was their obedience. It is true that through their disobedience, evil came into this world.

Restoring Obedience

God carried the theme of obedience throughout the bible. Toward the end of the Bible, God said, "Blessed are they that do his commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life" (Rev 22:14). You see, from the beginning, from paradise lost to paradise regained, God's law is unchangeable. Only obedience gives mankind access to the Tree of Life and God's Favor.

Through the Obedience of One Man

How do we regain what Adam and Eve lost? We read the answer in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. "For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (5:19). The whole redemption of Christ consists in restoring obedience to its proper place. For it is not those who say "Lord, Lord," but those who do the will of my Father who Jesus says has the right to heaven. Paradise, Calvary, Heaven all proclaim with one voice, "Child of God, the first and last thing your God asks of you is simple, universal, unchanging obedience."

God commended Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, the Israelites for obeying them, and he punished them for disobeying them. It is all summed up in the words, "I set before you . . . a blessing, if you obey . . . and a curse, if you will not obey" (Deut 11:26-28). That is the keynote of the Christian life. Our Canaan, just like Paradise and heaven, is the place of blessing as well as the place of obedience. It would be wonderful if we could take it in! But beware of praying only for a blessing. Let us be concerned with obedience; God will take care of the blessing. Let my one thought as a Christian be how I can obey and please my God perfectly. Samuel said to Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22).

The Blessings of Obedience

Jesus teaches us seven blessings from obedience in the beautiful parable about the vine and the branches. He tells us that if we obey His voice, **first**, He will hear and answer our prayers; **second**, he will make us his disciples and fill us with the fruits of His Spirit; **third**, He will give us the ecstatic awareness of knowing that He loves us just as much as the Father loves Him; **fourth**, He will give us perfect peace in the midst of our trials; **fifth**, He will give us the power to love one another with His love; **sixth**, He will make us His friends who always hear His voice; and **seventh**, He will choose us for a ministry so powerful that whatever we ask the Father in His Name He will give to us.

Christ's Triple Goal

Jesus came to be our model and example of true obedience. Secondly, He came to live within us, to empower us with His spirit of obedience so that we, like Him, would do the will of the Father. Third, He came to be head of the Church so that we would be obedient to His vicar and those over us. He also died to show us that His obedience meant a readiness to obey God even to the point of death.

Christ's School of Obedience

In the School of Christ, the secret of true obedience is a close intimate relationship with God. All our attempts to be fully obedient will be failures until we gain access to His abiding fellowship. Christ will be responsible for life totally surrendered to Him and the secret of true obedience is daily, intimate fellowship with Jesus through meditation, prayer, Eucharist, and openness to His Spirit.

Suffering of Obedience

Jesus learned obedience as to His human nature through what He suffered (Heb 5:8-9). Suffering is unnatural to us and calls for a surrendering to our will. Christ in His human nature needed to suffer so that He could learn to obey and give up His will to His Father at any cost. We also learn obedience through suffering.

The Textbook of Obedience

The textbook of obedience is the Bible. Scripture was not written solely to increase our knowledge. It was primarily written to guide our conduct that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim 3:17). By doing the will of God, ongoing revelation is given to us (cf Jn 17). The only way really to learn something is to do it. The only way to learn obedience to Christ is to give up our own will and make His will the delight of our hearts.

Ten Steps To A More Obedient Life

Step 1 **The first step to an obedient life is morning prayer.** there in the quiet of our own heart, we praise God and listen to the voice of His Spirit. This early time alone with God is the primary time for us to say, Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

Step 2 **Meditation on God's Word.** Meditation on the Scriptures is part of our morning prayer time. The scriptures are meant not simply to bring us head knowledge, but to lead us to wait upon God so that we can receive His grace and power to do His will. We must remember that it is only by the Holy Spirit's teaching that we can get at the meaning of God's Word so that it will really reach into the workings of our inner life and produce the fruits in us. The morning prayer time should prove to be a time of entire dependence upon and submission to the Holy Spirit's teaching.

Step 3 **Communication with God.** The purpose of prayer is communion with God. So praise Him until the spirit of worship comes, worship him until the presence comes and then stand in the presence until the anointing comes. Then we can live out of that anointing for the rest of the day by a close communion with Him.

Step 4 **Complete surrender in prayer.** Every day we should reconsecrate ourselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary asking only God's will in our life through their intercession.

Step 5 **Daily Mass.** Here especially at the offertory we offer everything that we have in union with God – our time, talent and treasure, our intellect, wills and emotions, our worries our fears and our doubts,. We surrender all. In union with the priest offering the bread to be consecrated, we offer all that we have and are. In union with the priest offering the wine to be consecrated, we offer all our sufferings, weaknesses, worries and doubts. Just as the bread and wine will be transformed into the body and soul of Christ, so we also shall experience the exact transformation. sot that we can say, "I live not I but Christ lives within me."

Step 6 **Daily Marian prayers, especially the rosary.** What a powerful ally we have in Mary our model of surrender and total obedience. As we prayer our rosary in union with her, our joyful, sorrowful and glorious moments are transformed as well.

Step 7 **Daily mortification and penance.** In order to bring our rebellious natures under the dominance of the spirit, we need to say no to the flesh. No to selfishness, no to

overindulgence, no to sin. One way to check ourselves is a daily examination of conscience and a frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Step 8. Fasting. Our Blessed Mother has asked that we fast on bread and water on Wednesday's and Friday's. Great cleansing of soul and great spiritual power is achieved through this.

Step 9 Practice poverty, chastity and obedience according to our state in life. Be very generous with your time, your talent and your treasure for you cannot outgive a totally generous God. Be very careful in your relationships to make sure that they are non-controlling and chaste. And be very observant, striving to do things God's way and not your way.

Step 10 Be a light to others in a darkened world. Realize that Christ wants to send us forth to be apostles of truth, love and action. As the Father has sent me, now I send you. Like Mother Teresa, who was such a powerful example of poverty, chastity and obedience, we too shall go forth to be other Christ's in a dark and broken world.