

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, May 14, 2023
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Cycle A

A man saw an angel walking down the street. The angel was carrying a torch in one hand a bucket of water in the other. “What are you going to do with that torch and that bucket of water?”, the man asked. The angel stopped abruptly, looked at the man, and said, “With the torch, I’m going to burn down the mansions of heaven; and with the bucket of water, I’m going to put out the fires of hell.” “Then we are going to see who really loves God.”

The point of the angel is that many people obey God’s commandments out of fear of punishment in hell or out of hope of reward in heaven. They do not obey them out of love. Jesus, in today’s gospel reading, says, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* *“Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me.”*

We should look upon Jesus’ commandments as an invitation to love – an opportunity to show our love for Jesus. If we love Jesus we will keep or obey his commandments. Our obedience must be rooted in love. It must be a manifestation of our love.

Many people misunderstand obedience. In most dictionaries, its synonyms include the following: compliance, conformity, submission, subordination, and so on. All of them generally connote following commands, yielding, or deference out of respect, superior authority, affection, persuasion, or compulsion.

It is usually between two subjects: one is superior, the other, inferior. This is a great misunderstanding. Tracing the etymology of obedience, it comes from the Latin “obederi”, which means “to listen”. It is used to mean “pay attention to.”

In the deepest meaning of the word, obedience implies that the two parties are listening, and paying attention to each other’s preferences. This is how Jesus describes His obedience to the Father. It stems from the reality, that, first there is an existing love relationship between Him and the Father. Jesus, in Chapter 14 of the Gospel of John, clearly insists on these dynamics: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23)

If a person is in love, it would be so easy for him to follow someone he loves. This is what Jesus is saying in 1 John 5:3 – “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

If I know my father loves me, I will follow what he says, because I know he loves me. Otherwise, the person will perceive it as controlling and demanding. Dorothy Day affirms this when she said, “True obedience is a matter of love, which makes it voluntary, not compelled by fear or force.”

Jesus expresses it clearly to us today: “If you love me, you will keep my Commandments.” Jesus’ demands of obedience are His way of inviting all of us to love Him. Those who are in love are the best disciples of obedience.

Amen