

## A Liberating Obedience

The search for self-fulfillment and meaning in life, and the striving for liberty understood as decisive autonomy, always force us to choose between good and evil, between a truth that confronts us and our understanding of reality. Palm

Sunday gives us the chance to stop and reflect on the choices we face and carefully consider the proposal of freedom that Christ offers us. In the Second Reading of today's Liturgy, St. Paul helps us grasp this proposal, which is based on a process of self-emptying that will enable us to experience a liberty that springs from obedience to the God of love: "He humbled himself, becoming obedient" (Phil. 2:8).

The journey of self-emptying is often understood as self-annihilation, which is erroneous because, in actual fact, it is an ascent to the heights of self-fulfillment and to the discovery of meaning in life. "Emptying" is an act of self-offering; it readies us for the powerful experience of love—something we all long for but often fail to live. The desire for love prompts us to empty ourselves of everything that blocks this experience, freeing us from a preoccupation with self so as to discover the joy of building our life in union with others.

The obedience that Christ asks of us invites us to overcome the closure of heart generated by selfishness and to be attentive to the situations of others. This enables us to welcome our neighbors and build a new life together with them. In his self-offering to the point of the cross, Christ is our "Way" to reach the genuine freedom for which everyone yearns. In following this Way, we must take care to make choices that are not self-centered but other-oriented. Today's society revolves always more around individuality and self-fulfillment, and thus the values of humiliation and obedience are rejected because they conflict with reality. Christ and the truths he proposes to us in the Gospel are always more marginalized from public life and relegated to the private sphere.

"Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Lk. 23:18) The reply of the crowd to Pilate's offer to free Jesus is symbolic of contemporary behavior. Christ is eliminated because he creates scandal and clashes with society's way of thinking. The choice of Barabbas is a rebellion against power so as to affirm one's personal freedom and self-determination. But this choice results in solitude and the discovery that one is in actual fact weak and fragile.

How can we help others recognize that the trail blazed by Christ is the path that leads to complete self-fulfillment, not self-annihilation? By sharing with them the joy that comes from the crucified Christ because it is only when we take this sign of love as our starting point that we can serve humanity by building a genuine spirit of fraternity. As Pope Francis said in his first homily to the Cardinals, we must have "the courage, the real courage, to walk in the presence of the Lord, with the cross of the Lord; to build the Church on the blood of the Lord, which was poured out on the cross, and to confess our sole glory: Christ crucified." The journey pointed out by Christ is that of self-emptying so as to live in the genuine freedom that springs from obedience to his proposal of love. If we following in his footsteps, we will be builders of the Kingdom, living stones in the Church, born of the obedience of Christ.

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