

THE RECTOR'S CHRONICLE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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Dear Parishioners and Friends,

We often read in the New Testament about the importance of obedience. For those steeped in the Protestant emphasis on grace over good works, this induces a vague discomfort, as it seems to make salvation depend on us. This, however, misses the point. I suspect that the emphasis on obedience is not aimed at settling the question of faith versus works in the order of our salvation, but in rather a different direction.

It goes back to Adam and Eve in the Garden. There they lived in the fulness of the love of God. Their lives were centered on Him, and He “walked” in the Garden with them, with intimate familiarity. The love which they shared with Him allowed them to depend upon Him and obey Him with joy and contentment. “Their happiness was in the love of God, in Whose likeness they were made; and while they had that love, faith in Him would be their strength, and obedience their delight.” (Isaac Williams, *Characters of the Old Testament*, pp 2-3) Because their love for God (as they received His love for them) ruled in their hearts, faith and obedience came naturally and easily.

More, in their life in the Garden, the way they had to show their love for God was by obedience and trust. They trusted Him for their daily food (which was abundantly present) and that it would be there on the morrow. They obeyed Him in caring for the Garden and the animals as He had given the responsibility to Adam. Most tellingly, their obedience was required in the prohibition of eating the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. That is of course the one that got them into trouble. The point is that it was by obedience that they could show their love for God. Their love for each other they could show by tender care, and likewise for the animals by caring for them and looking after them. But God did not need anything from them. So if they were to show their love in action and not just in word or sentiment, it would be by a willing obedience. One might even speculate that one of God's purposes in giving them the prohibition on eating of the Tree of Knowledge was to give them the opportunity to show their love by obedience. Otherwise they would have little way to show their love for Him and thus grow into the fullness of His love.

It is with this background that the New Testament emphasis on obedience begins to make sense. Our Lord, St Paul tells us, “learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” He *learned* obedience because the first Adam had refused to learn in the Garden. Christ's learning took place in the wilderness and on the Place of a Skull rather than in a lush garden, and was as painful to Him as Adam's should have been delightful. Christ's obedience manifested the love He had for the Father, and thus atones for Adam's refusal to love. As Adam's lack of love showed itself by disobedience, so Christ's love is shown by His obedience – “... to death, even the death of the Cross.”

It is important for us to practice obedience in the New Covenant, not because the Covenant entails a new and more stringent legalism on top of the old legalism of the old Law. Rather, obedience is essential for us because it (along with trust) is the way we return the love which God gives us. It is the way we will follow the new Adam and not the old. We are to obey as Jesus obeyed – out of love.

We should remember this when obedience is hard – when we are sorely tempted to disobey by sin, most commonly because our desires are disordered (as were Eve's). Then it is not just a matter of gritting our teeth and trying to tough it out by force of will. We should instead remember the love which God has for us, and be motivated by that love to love Him back. We might, for example, spend some time each day pondering His love for us: whether meditating on the Passion of our Lord, or imagining ourselves cradled in His arms. From our desire to respond to His love and Him back comes the desire to please Him by our obedience. Christian life is all about love – being loved by God, loving Him back, loving others as He loves us. Obedience is one way we live that life. Of course, it is also true that love makes the keeping of the commandments a light burden and an easy yoke. It is most of all when we lose sight of the love that the commandments become burdensome.

Ivy Hall

We've now had two Sundays at Ivy Hall. We missed one because of the hurricane, when we stayed home, either because we had no choice or because we heeded the authorities who asked us to. It was one of those days when I was grateful to have an oratory in the rectory, so that I could still offer the Holy Sacrifice to God's glory and for the parish, even though the parish could not gather in person. I trust prayers were said in all our homes that Sunday as well.

I'm delighted (and not surprised) that the Ivy Hall facilities have met with great favor, indeed enthusiasm. The ballroom works well for Mass; the acoustics are great for singing; it is a lovely and beautiful space. The dining room where we have coffee is very comfortable, and the whole house is beautifully restored. Parking has not been a problem, and the staff has made us more than welcome. I guess the biggest drawback is that for most of us (not all) it is a few minutes further away. So I'm glad that we have landed there (and grateful to Dr Haas for welcoming us), and likewise glad to see the joy of the congregation at our new (if temporary) space.

When we decided to accept the offer of Ivy Hall, we knew that there is a conflict coming for the first Sunday in October (the Fifteenth after Trinity, and in the Octave of St Michael and All Angels). Ivy Hall is not available that Sunday morning, October 2nd. We have been offered similar space at the National Catholic Bioethics Center, less than a block away at 6399 Drexel Road. Drexel Road is the one which dead ends at Lancaster Avenue across from Ivy Hall. The NCBC is towards the end of the first block of Drexel Road from Lancaster Avenue. If you turn onto Drexel Road from Lancaster, the NCBC is on the right before you reach 64th Street. This, too, is courtesy of Dr Haas, who is President of the NCBC. The Mass will be at 9:30 that Sunday, and after that (as well as during September) we will be at Ivy Hall.

Catechesis

As noted earlier, there will be a program of instruction for the laity who will be entering the Ordinariate. We don't have all the details yet, but I would hope that everyone at St Michael's will participate even if you are not inclined towards the Ordinariate. It will be a great opportunity for the parish as a whole to come together and consider the basics of the faith as well as the distinctives of Roman teaching, the "areas of historic divergence." That way those entering the Ordinariate will know what they are getting into, and those who choose not to will know where the obstacles lie. We plan to start the catechesis in October. The text appointed is the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. I mention this in case you would like to get a head start on the reading. For your convenience, I will have copies available after Mass on Sundays.

Church of the Good Shepherd

I would ask your prayers for the Church of the Good Shepherd in Rosemont. The Diocese of Pennsylvania had sued the parish to take control of it, and the Montgomery County Orphans Court has ruled in favor of the Diocese. While the legal issues were somewhat different from ours, the outcome is essentially the same. This leaves the people with the choice of remaining with the building and within the Diocese of Pennsylvania and the Episcopal Church, and thus under the authority of Bishop Bennison, or else leaving the property. Fr Moyer has indicated his intention to enter the Ordinariate when that is possible, and invited any who wish to join him. He has begun holding Sunday services elsewhere. I fear Good Shepherd has been rather more divided over things than St James ever was, which of course weakens the parish in its ability to deal with this kind of crisis. We are well-placed to intercede for them, since we have been through both litigation and leaving the Episcopal Church.

I would also ask you to pray for All Saints' in Wynnewood. Under Fr Rix's leadership (as well as that of his predecessor), they have not been willing to welcome Bishop Bennison to preach or celebrate. As a result, they are likely to be the next target for the Diocese of Pennsylvania. As you well know, they have been particularly generous to us in letting us use their space for Stations in Lent, quiet days and the like. So charity will move us to pray for them as well as Good Shepherd, as they follow in the way of faithfulness, which is by God's grace the way of the Cross.

Kudos

Thanks goes this month to:

- Michael and Stephanie LaRue, and my son Jonathan, for helping to move from West Laurel Hill Cemetery to Ivy Hall.
- My mother for doing the folding and stuffing for last month's *Chronicle* mailing.
- Pat Lincoln, for laundering all the servers' cassocks and cottas when we moved from West Laurel Hill
- all those who faithfully attend St Michael's in spite of the changes and uncertainties.

Faithfully,

David Ousley