



ASPECTS OF OBEDIENCE

February 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace and all good!

For PROPOSITUM in the coming years, we will continue the theme of the General Assembly, 2017, and present articles and your responses to deepen in the four pillars of the Third Order Rule. We will include expert input with each issue, as well as the lived-experience contributions as before.



This issue is focused on: *Obedience in Love* (Chapter VIII). The root word for obedience is to hear or to listen to someone. In our Franciscan tradition, we can well remember the beginning of Francis' conversion as he prayed before the San Damiano Cross:

Most High and Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Give me true faith, certain hope and perfect charity, sense and knowledge that I may carry out your holy and true command.

We, too, pray in this spirit and seek to listen to God, to hear the Word of God to us, individually as well as in community. Always there is a need to keep looking ahead and walking on the path before us. Always we are challenged to keep a balance between what can be because we determine it and what should be knowing that it is God's work, not ours. As we acknowledge these challenges, we come back to our Rule and Life:

Let them willingly serve and obey "one another with the mutual love which comes from the spirit". This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ. TORule#25

May we always have a listening heart, the obedience of love:

Within themselves, let them always make a dwelling place and home for the one who is Lord God almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, so that, with undivided hearts, they may increase in universal love by continually turning to God and to neighbor. TORule#8

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Aspects of Obedience

Sr. Christina Mülling OSF

In the lower church of San Francesco, the obedient Francis is depicted with a yoke the ropes of which God the Father holds in his hands. At first sight he looks like a puppet. Not a desirable image for a man of today: the obedient man as a will-less puppet in the hands of another?

1. Finding the Centre of Gravity



But if you look deeper, this picture gets a different meaning. In his essay on the marionette, Kleist wonders why marionettes are so fascinating for people. He comes to the conclusion that it is because they have only one focus. All limbs are assigned to this centre of gravity, no matter what thread you pull or how you move the figure. This is what makes the marionette's movements so elegant and fascinating. Seen in this way, leading a life in obedience means having found one's centre of gravity and assigning all movements of the heart, all doing and thinking to one's centre of gravity. In a second step, Kleist asks himself why people are often so uninspiring. He comes to the conclusion that people often have two main focuses: being and appearance. This inner conflict makes them untrustworthy and lacking in fascination.

Francis still fascinates many people today. Perhaps this is because in his life he found the focus to which he assigned everything: God!

After all, it is not just any hands to which Francis has surrendered himself. They are the hands of God into which he laid his life. He experienced this God as one who loves him unconditionally, in whom he can trust blindly and who surrounds him with mercy. He wants to belong to this God, he wants to be guided by him, in him he wants to find himself ever more deeply.

2. Obedience must be Enlightened

If we look at this picture even more deeply, it decodes the essence of obedience even more.

It depicts a chapter room under Francis. In the centre, obedience imposes on Francis the yoke of which Jesus says: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart; in this way you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mt 11:29-30).

Obedience is admonishing to silence by holding a finger before the mouth. Silence is needed to hear the soft whisper of the Spirit, to recognize the soft voice of God among the many loud voices.

The hall has two windows through which light falls onto obedience, freeing it from darkness and blindness. Below the left window St. Prudentia, Wisdom, is represented with a square halo. She holds a compass in her hand. In front of her is a sextant, a modern instrument for that time. Wisdom gives orientation by aligning herself with the knowledge of the time. She has a face in front and behind, i.e. she is prudent. She has the past, the present and the future in view. In this way she gives the conscience orientation and sharpens it. It is an elementary task of human persons to sharpen their conscience and to work on their development so that obedience remains prudent and does not become blind.

Below the right window faith is kneeling. It has a burning candle in its hand and gives light to obedience in its own way. Even Israel knew that faith comes from hearing. "Listen, Israel, Yahweh our God is the one, the only Lord"

(Dt 6:4).

Faith comes from listening to the Word of God. The obedient person wants to belong to God. It is therefore important to listen to the Word of God and to open oneself to it. For obedience not to become one-sided, however,



both "lights" are needed. Conscience must be formed and further developed so that there can be true orientation. An unformed conscience can easily be abused or get caught in feelings of guilt where there is no guilt. That is why conscience needs training, an opening up to theological and scientific knowledge of every kind.

3. Obedience for Francis

In the third admonition, Francis presents us with three forms of obedience. They offer guidance not only to religious, but also to all those who wish to shape their lives by listening to one another.

The Lord says in the Gospel: "Whoever does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple" and: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it". That man leaves all that he possesses and loses his body and soul, who gives himself completely into the hands of his superior in obedience.

And whatever he does and talks about, if he knows that it is not against the will of his superior, then this is true obedience, only provided that what he does is good.

And when the subject once sees something which he considers better and more useful to his soul than what the superior commands him to do, he shall voluntarily sacrifice his own insight to God; but what comes from the superior he shall actively seek to fulfill. For this is obedience borne by love, because it satisfies God and one's neighbour.

But if the superior were to order the subject to do something against his soul, the subject may not obey him, but should not leave him. And if he were therefore persecuted by some, he should love them even more for God's sake. For he who endures persecution rather than wanting to be separated from his brethren truly persists in perfect obedience because he gives his life for his brethren. Admonition 1-9 (FQ 47)

First of all, Francis speaks of **true obedience**. It is normal that in a relationship, a family, a religious community, agreements have to be made and kept. As soon as I share my life with others, I can no longer live as if I were alone. My decisions must also be based on the well-being of others and the whole.

Secondly, Francis speaks of **loving obedience**. This form of obedience involves letting go of my own ideas and conceptions for the sake of love and peace, even if I consider them the better solution. If I want to impose mine, but peace or love suffer from it, it is better to renounce it - if it is not against my conscience.

Francis, however, puts **perfect obedience** at the top. It represents the seriousness of obedience, which is rarely demanded of us in everyday life. In perfect obedience, a person is committed to his conscience, which he must follow, even if he must stand against his superior / neighbour. This form of obedience frees those who obey from following an order, but not from their relationship with others and from bearing the consequences of supposed disobedience: even if they persecute and beat you, you must not abandon them! This ability and willingness to suffer is the touchstone for the authenticity of this obedience.

Obedience in Francis is also always a **mutual event** at the service of fraternity. According to the Canon Law in force at that time, there were two types of Christians: "Those who command and those who obey. The former are clerics, the latter lay," wrote the learned Camaldolese Gratian around 1140 in his "Decretum", which systematized ecclesiastical law decisively. Francis wished that no one, neither clergy nor laity, neither "superiors" nor "subordinates" should exercise power over another in any way. Love should be the only criterion by which obedience must be measured.

Similarly, no brother should exercise power or dominion here, least of all among the brothers themselves. For as the Lord says in the Gospel, "The princes of the nations rule over them, and those who are greater exercise power over them." It shall not be so among the brethren. But whoever wants to become the greater among them, be their servant and bondsman, and whoever is the greater among them, become as the younger. And no brother shall do evil to another, or speak evil to another. Rather, through the love of the Spirit, they should voluntarily serve and obey one another. And this is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ. uneres Herrn Jesus Christus.

Regula non bullata 5,9-15 (FQ 74)

Conclusion:

Obedience has in mind the demands of everyday life, love and peaceful coexistence, insofar as this is not a question of conscience.

Conscience has the highest priority in obedience. In the event of an earnest case, conscience frees us from obedience to a person, but not from our relationship with that person.



Giotto, Obedience,
Lower church, Assisi

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Stefan Diller

From Knowledge to Life

**I/We contemplate Giotto's
fresco:**

- What attracts or disturbs me?
- What is important to me personally in relation to obedience?
- What forms of obedience am I familiar with in my own life? What are the experiences I have had with them?
- What can I/what can we do to form our conscience?
- Where do I sense that I have to be obedient and what can help me in this?

Listening as an Attitude of Obedience

An essential attitude of obedience is listening.

There are different kinds of hearing. One can simply hear, one can listen and one can be "all ears". The person who simply hears, understands what is said. A good listener also notices how something is being said. But only the one who is "all ears" also understands what is meant. If I lend someone my ear, then I tune in to them, I am at their disposal. I feel I belong to them.

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SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ITS JUSTICE



“Therefore, in every kind of Chapter they have let them ‘seek first the kingdom of God and its justice,’ and exhort one another to observe this rule which all have professed...” *Rule VIII, 25*

On the weekend of November 29 to December 2, 2018, The Congregation of Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity gathered for the first delegate/alternate meeting preparing for their 2019 Chapter. During that time, we attempted to “listen carefully to each other and to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” This is a concrete example of the Obedience of Love. Obedience required us to listen with an open mind and heart. Love required us to put aside our own wills and preferences in the event that God may be telling us something new or confirming something already in place. This willing service to and with one another was enlivening, energizing and enlightening.

*Submitted in English by
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The Obedience of Love

The title of this chapter, *The Obedience of Love*, led me to investigate the etymology of *obey*. The Latin roots amount to *toward hearing*. How interesting! The act of obeying is thus not complete in itself. It is a moving toward something, toward hearing. It does not say, toward action, toward acceptance, toward understanding or even toward closure. The definition leaves us moving toward hearing. Isn't hearing something that is done in an instant? Apparently not. The very act of hearing is just a step in a process, a movement. This must necessarily be a thoroughly human movement—a movement of our totality, body, mind and soul.

Living this obedience of love is necessarily a vibrant and animated response that cannot exist in a vacuum, but that flourishes in a community of disciples united in purpose. It lives in the Body of Christ, in the Community. This obedience has feet that carry us in the direction of justice. Our obedience dares us to delight in service, to willingly wash the feet of all who join us in the journey to the Kingdom. Washing those feet may take many forms within and beyond the needs of our Community members and those who claim the Church as their own.

This obedience, as the author reminds us, has a face. It is the face of those called to minister, to serve as authorities among us. That face is truly the Face of Jesus visible to us. The article leaves us with a beautiful reminder that the minister or servant radiates the presence of Jesus necessarily in both admonition and encouragement. This is truly the image of the compassionate Christ who longs for us to be with him for eternity and who will do whatever we require so as to be formed into his image.

Though it would not be difficult to carry the image of the parts of the body to great lengths in considering obedience (lungs to breathe in the will of God, brain to remind us of the need for conscious consideration of the demands of obedience in our lives, arms that grow in strength the more they are used, just as the art of obedient living grows the more it is lived), one must finally come to the fact that obedience has a heart. What would this vow become without the heart? It spirals down into mindless following, sullen acquiescence, a pious powerlessness. But when we obey from the heart, when our response is pulsing with the movement toward hearing, then it is worthy of offering to the One we love. Obedience of love is obedience that is alive, that matches its rhythm to the perceived voice of God. Obedience of love is “the whole package” that Jesus calls forth from us, which we offer totally to him. This obedience will not allow us to be still. It moves us to larger love, to holier hearing.

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FRANCISCAN OBEDIENCE

The basis of Franciscan obedience is love. We look to Jesus for the example and meaning of obedience in love in the mystery of His life, death and resurrection. St. Francis of Assisi gives additional concrete examples of living obedience in humility. Obedience in love is demonstrated through respect, cooperation and making sincere personal and communal efforts to seek and find the Will of God in all that is asked of us as Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Through a listening heart and daily prayer, we seek to grow in harmony with God's thoughts and ways.

Obedience requires trustful dialog with our superiors and with our Sisters in Community. Following the example of Christ, the Sisters inspire willing obedience by respecting the dignity of one another, listening to them, encouraging their initiative and motivating all to cooperate for the good of the Congregation and the Church. Obedience in love is Christian Discipleship, a life lived in Faith, Hope and Love. It is essentially a life of sacrifice looking to the needs of others before my own. Obedience in love is responding in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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Congregation: Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity

Country: United States of America

Language: English



Most High and Glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me true faith,
Certain hope and
Perfect charity, sense and knowledge
That I may carry out your holy and
True command

Exploring the many facets of the vows

At this moment in time, I am a second year novice in the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, residing in Aston, PA. Because I am preparing to profess first vows early in the coming August, I am making every effort to explore the many facets of our vows --- both their essence and spirit as well as how they will impact my life and how I will live them. In the interest of full disclosure, I should confess that I am an old novice, to say the least! As a nephew of mine shared recently, 'I figure you are probably the oldest novice in the USA.....maybe the world!' The latter deduction has been disproven, I might add.



What I saw as a disadvantage in starting this journey is, in many ways, a gift of a perspective not many have when starting out. So many examples and experiences of God's extravagant love and mercy have already filled my life. Knowing that the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are an essential foundation to this *religious* life, I started to read and listen and ponder what they really were and what they would exact from me. Then I discovered the term, 'obedience in love' in the rule of the Third Order Regular. I'd have to say, that phrase stopped me cold. What I can only call an 'amazing grace' has given me a new sense of vowed life.....one not of deprivation but of freedom and abandon to make room for what really matters....LOVE. The vows give me the opportunity, as a religious, to live in relation to all God's creation and truly absorb the call to gospel living and relationship with others as one expression of the presence of Christ that is found in each of us. As Andrew Lloyd

Weber's song, 'Love Changes Everything' so simply states, nothing is ever the same. All three vows complement one another and create a path for me to travel to try to be the Jesus of the Gospels for and with others. We form church and, together in relationship, encourage and support one another on this life's journey. Traveling lightly makes that journey easier.

Obedience in love invites me to free myself to value others in a truly loving way without counting what I receive in return. That freedom enables me to be empty enough to work at what God wants me to do, using my free will to choose LOVE. It reminds me that all is gift, even my desire/calling to give back to God what I have been so generously showered with all my life. Each breath and thought and desire is made possible only through the unfathomable love and wisdom of God. Each and every person reflects that gift in many and varied ways. When I can absorb this, it makes me think of Merton's experience on that street corner in Louisville, KY. In the prayer that Francis offers before the Crucifix as well, he asks only for 'true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity' that his life might reflect the loving Jesus he had come to know.

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Serve and obey one another with mutual love...

Chapter 8 of the Third Order Rule of St. Francis is entitled “*The Obedience of Love.*” Reading this chapter is the diving board into an understanding of vowed Franciscan Obedience. *Living Franciscan Obedience* is only found at the deeper end of the pool. In my 38th year of vowed life, I am still making my way towards that deeper end. Here’s what I’ve learned so far!

“Remember...they have given up their own wills.” *Obedience as Compliance* with God’s will, yes, but also as mediated through human authority. In early formation, there were times I wanted to be here and do this and was told to go there and do that. God’s grace intervened as the Voice in my head: “If I couldn’t do what I wanted to do, it would not be for nothing!” I had to put meaning and purpose into compliance as a way to honor and bless that which I had to surrender; it would not be wasted! **Obedience as Compliance, but with proper attitude!**

“...to follow faithfully in the footprints of Jesus Christ.” *Obedience as Conformity*; yes, to community living, to a new ministry or place. But the Rule pulls us further – conformity not to a what, but to a Who! This is where Franciscan Obedience merges with our Baptismal promise “to become holy!” That is to become like Christ; in values, priorities, attitudes, words, behavior and interior disposition....for me it simply means to *become* an image of the One in whose Image I am made! First conformity is to God in Jesus, and then blending my own personality and character to those of Francis and Clare. **Obedience as Conformity** is to live the Family Resemblance; as a daughter of God and as sister to Francis and Clare!

“...serve and obey one another with mutual love...” *Obedience as Responsiveness to the needs of other.* Following Mary’s example at Cana, Jesus responds to a large hungry crowd, to a grieving widow, to a group of lepers, to tax collectors! Our Rule stresses the mutuality of obedient love. I believe we’re called to something more. Talk about mutual obedience, I think of community living. Talk about obedient love, I think of responsiveness to the needs of others, through ministry, charitable works towards those who cannot reciprocate, a kind and peaceful disposition towards those who are ambivalent or even hostile towards me. **Obedience is responsiveness** to the needs of others, in both mutual and non-reciprocal relationships.

“...let them willingly serve...” *Obedience as Fidelity to Mission and Ministry.* despite the cost, hardship and sacrifice. Jesus chose death rather than compromise his mission of revealing and bringing God’s Love *for us to us* (that we are lovable and worth loving) and revealing the full potential of our human nature, (that we are capable of loving!) **Obedience as Fidelity to Mission**, rooted in God’s love for all people, especially those on the margins, is enabled by our own capacity to love and has, as its end, the building of the Kingdom of Love.

The vow of obedience I made 38 years ago has gradually grown and deepened, often hidden in the folds of everyday life. But the journey continues, always aiming for the deeper end of the pool.

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THE OBEDIENCE OF LOVE

Being obedient in love is lived in the circumstances of our lives.

Our Constitutions state: “Following the example of Christ, the Sisters, through the vow of obedience, commit their minds and wills, natural gifts and graces, undertaking the commitments entrusted to them with generous availability, thus participating in the Divine plan of salvation.” (#20)

“Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of the one who sent me . . .’ (Jn. 4:34).

St. Francis encouraged Leo: “In whatever way you think you will best please our Lord God...” giving Leo freedom to choose whatever is better and do more for God. (I 1232, O-118)



I have learned that obedience leads to abandonment to God’s will. Francis prayed: “God, grant that we may do for your sake alone what we know you want us to do, and always want what pleases you...” This total surrender led Francis in trusting God’s Divine Will. I pray it leads me too.

I have often faced difficulties and challenges, and struggled with my own limitations. In these times I was called to a deep sense of prayerful listening, asking God to do for me what I could not myself accomplish. I came to

believe that if what I was doing was for the love of God, God would do with and for me what I could not do alone. Many times this has called for carrying the cross with love, being detached from “my way” and open to God’s providence.

I have learned that “With Christ all things are possible.” I see that as I put my best foot forward, and lean on Christ, good things happen. In other words, I am to do the best I can, and leave the rest to God. I have come to understand that I am not in control: God’s love is.

Recently, one of our main province ministries, an all-girls academy, had to close. I was asked to be part of a committee to explore, pray, and discern what God was asking of us next. How could we continue giving our gifts, while being faithful to our charism of service to God’s people, especially youth?

I had been Director of Our Lady of the Angels House of Prayer, where small retreats, days of prayer, and spiritual direction were already meeting the spiritual needs of God’s people.

Calls started coming in, asking us to allow our former school building to be used for larger group retreats. Doing this would be a risk for our community. To repurpose the building into a retreat space would take time, resources, and support. Leadership was willing to take this risk. Little by little, with God’s grace, contributions of good people, and with hard work, our former school became a place that continues to provide spiritual nourishment for many.

This transition was not easy. It called for deep listening, sacrifice, hard work, and dedication. The Holy Spirit guided us to surrender to the will of our Father in the obedience of trustful love. With God’s guidance, it has brought faith and hope to our many lives.

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OBEDIENCE IN LOVE

Oh how blessed a religious could be! But we cannot achieve this by taking a few steps without great effort. The Franciscan Sisters of St. Anna (FSSA) have made effort in showing obedience in love in serving others in our daily activities e.g.:

- ❖ Preparing meals for the community
- ❖ Common laundry
- ❖ Setting table for meals
- ❖ Being punctual for community and communal prayers
- ❖ Recreating together in the evenings
- ❖ Consulting each other for better understanding before acting
- ❖ Listening to each other at the time of sharing and allowing dialogue when there is misunderstanding.
- ❖ Before important meetings like the Annual General Assembly, of Chapters, there is always a Novena together to invoke the Holy Spirit for a good outcome.

Obedience in love urges us to give charitable services like visiting the sick in hospitals, providing food for the needy, praying with Christians, counseling family members, teaching catechism, meeting and teaching Youths who may go astray.

Obedience in love calls for the spirit of a servant. As FSSA, we serve the orphans, widows and widowers by listening to their problems and giving them pieces of advice, building for them shelters and providing them work to do and pay their wages.

Obedience in love is self-emptying by having only what we need not what we want and sharing our talents e.g. Teaching sewing, knitting, cookery to those who can benefit from them.

Obedience in love is calling us as FSSA to respect and cooperate with the authority by accepting transfers and appointments. IT makes us have authority as our reference in all that we do by not doing anything behind them or without their knowledge. Because of obedience we endure the daily challenges in Religious life

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