

20. January 2020

“Obedience is better than sacrifice”

1 Sam 15,16-23

Samuel then said to Saul, 'Stop! Let me tell you what Yahweh said to me last night.' He said, 'Go on.' Samuel said, 'Small as you may be in your own eyes, are you not the leader of the tribes of Israel? Yahweh has anointed you as king of Israel. When Yahweh sent you on a mission he said to you, "Go and put those sinners, the Amalekites, under the curse of destruction and make war on them until they are exterminated." Why then did you not obey Yahweh's voice? Why did you fall on the booty and do what is wrong in Yahweh's eyes?' Saul replied to Samuel, 'But I did obey Yahweh's voice. I went on the mission which Yahweh gave me; I brought back Agag king of the Amalekites; I put Amalek under the curse of destruction; and from the booty the people have taken the best sheep and cattle of what was under the curse of destruction only to sacrifice them to Yahweh your God in Gilgal.' To which, Samuel said: Is Yahweh pleased by burnt offerings and sacrifices or by obedience to Yahweh's voice? Truly, obedience is better than sacrifice, submissiveness than the fat of rams. Rebellion is a sin of sorcery, presumption a crime of idolatry! 'Since you have rejected Yahweh's word, he has rejected you as king.'

The reading of the Old Testament leads us today to the theme of obedience. Many times obedience is understood in a military sense.

Obedience in a Christian understanding, however, is a loving listening to God, who does not see us as mere subjects to whom he gives orders, but as his children, friends and collaborators in his Kingdom. Unification with him can even go as far as having a spousal character!

If we imagine the obedience of the angels, we can easily imagine how this obedience works: the love of God inspires these wonderful beings and they hurry to serve God.

Mary's obedience is also very vividly and attractively presented to us. After the angel's message and her humble question: "How is this to be done?" she submits with confidence to the ways of God and thus to the surrender to God Himself!

Sacred Scripture reveals to us that the first fall into sin is related to disobedience. Adam and Eve did not fulfill the divine command, and so misfortune came with all its subsequent consequences.

With this background, we can meditate on the story told in today's reading. Saul had received his instructions from God and he then arbitrarily interpreted them differently for himself and so acted in disobedience. The consequence was that God withdrew his office as king. It was also not enough that he partly fulfilled the will of God, because disobedience also breaks in when, for example, we fulfill all the commandments of God, but leave out one of them.

Obedience is better than sacrifice. This is easy to understand. In sacrifice we ourselves offer something to God, for example certain prayers and actions, fasting, etc. This is a good act and God will also accept it if it is done in the right spirit. But in obedience, God's will is done directly and our whole attitude is that of one who listens and receives. This is the right attitude before God, the attitude that the Virgin Mary also had: a confident listening!

Disobedience becomes worse when it is additionally marked by defiance, that is, by rebellion. In this case, the pride that is manifested in disobedience becomes demonic. That is why the Prophet Samuel compares it to sorcery, for here, too, there is rebellion against God and other things are put in His place. The same applies to rebellion, insisting on one's own opinion and not accepting the will and instructions of God.

Obedience is a golden key to the Kingdom of God. In listening to and internalizing His instructions, the heart wakes up more and more in love for Him. In disobedience the heart closes itself and the person falls back on himself. He enters, so to speak - without being aware of it - the rebellion of Satan.

There can be limits to obedience! Not before God, of course, but conflicts of conscience can arise with the secondary or tertiary authorities, if these themselves are not faithful to the instructions of God or are in error! Absolute obedience is possible only to God and to truths that come from God. But if we try to live in this obedience, then we will be able to distinguish if a real conflict with obedience might occur or if we are stubborn!

May the Lord give us the obedience of the angels and of the Virgin Mary!