

# Saints *Alive!*

A Periodic Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Issue  
24

## A Life of Obedience

By Rich Cleveland

*So, another lesson in this parable is that obedience is not simply about doing the right thing, but doing the right thing for the right motive; out of love for the Father.*

For adults in our culture the concept of obedience, similar to the concept of submission, often invokes a sense of distaste, almost to the point of moral revulsion. They often communicate that it would be beneath one's dignity to ever have to obey or submit to another. Modern culture has turned an attitude and behavior which should be commendable into an attack on equality, suggesting that if a person was to obey or submit to another then it would mean that the one obeying or submitting is somehow inferior to the other. In reality obedience and submission when given to an appropriate authority is an outstanding, commendable characteristic. Spiritually speaking when one obeys and is submissive to the Lord Jesus and his word, this practice becomes a virtue of promise.

Obedience is most clearly defined by the life of Jesus. As Saint Paul explains in the book of Philippians Jesus, even though he was Emmanuel, God with us, rather than defending his equality he laid his equality aside, and became obedient to the Father, incarnated as a man, lived a life of holiness and service to mankind, and was willing to die to bring about man's salvation. Saint Paul explains that Jesus, Emmanuel, "emptied himself," "became a servant," "humbled himself" and was "obedient to the point of death" on the cross. Thus, he is the exemplar of obedience, and his life defines obedience as being a noble characteristic ("God has highly exalted him"), and involve both attitudes and actions of love that aims at honoring and glorifying the Father.

Jesus' many teachings, as well as his life's example, provide illustrations as to how we are to live this life of obedience. Two parables about sons and their relationship with their fathers, especially seem to define the parameters of obedience. The first is found in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 21: The father spoke to first one son and then the other say-

ing, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." The first son blatantly said "No," but later changed his mind and went. The second responded positively, "I go, sir," but did not go. Jesus asked those to whom he shared the story, "Which of the two did the will of his father?" The lesson seems to be that obedience is ultimately about *doing* the Father's will whether you feel like it or not, and it is not simply about what you say in agreement to the father's wishes, but whether you submit your will to the Father's and actually obey.

The second parable, found in Luke 15, is also about two sons. One desired to be foot loose and fancy free as the old saying goes, so he asked for his inheritance and went off to live beyond the range of his father's oversight, where no one could tell him what to do. In his foolishness he followed his passions and spent his inheritance unwisely in dissipation until he was completely broke, down and out. All of this foolishness and sin enabled him to wise-up a little, and he eventually returned, humble and ready to submit to his father, even if the only opportunity would be to serve as one of the family servants.

The other brother remained home and to all apparent purposes worked diligently on his father's farm. But later when his father was rejoicing at the return of his self-serving son, whom the father considered dead, the brother who remained at home complainingly described his life thus; "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command." But he said this in anger and jealousy because he had never received a similar celebratory party. We can see that his obedient service to his father had been given somewhat reluctantly and with a hidden desire to also be foot loose and fancy free. So, another lesson in this parable is that **obedience is not simply about doing the right thing, but doing the right thing for the right motive; out of love for the Father.**

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*“But this command I gave them, ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.”*

—Jeremiah 7:23

## Emmaus Journey

### MISSION:

Emmaus Journey is a lay Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry which partners with parishes, small groups and individuals to facilitate a personal encounter with and conversion to Christ, thereby forming missionary disciples actively living for Jesus.

### VISION:

By encountering Christ through scripture, discipleship and community—individuals experience: 1) conversion to Christ; 2) transformation in Christ; and 3) mobilization for Christ, where they are actively involved in sharing their faith with others and living out their faith in the greater community. Thus achieving Goal One of the USCCB’s initiative on evangelization, “To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others.”



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## From the Heart

By Henry Abeyta

**N**ow we are in the heart of Lent with Easter before us. Let’s turn to a theme so critical to our on-going spiritual journey, that of “obedience.” What does the word stir up in your mind? Having just celebrated a grandson’s birthday, I saw parents at the party with expectations on their children as they played with one another. They and their kids had a view of obedience and its outcomes: from the parent’s perspective, that of learning cooperation and “playing nicely” with others. While for the kids, some responded with, “but do I have to?” or “I don’t want to!” while others did what they were told out of a sense of compliance motivated by their parent. How do we in our own lives respond in “obedience” to God our creator?

For some of us, it is out of a sense of fear and a need to comply with the wishes of God but in aspects that we define for ourselves. A sort of keeping God segregated to a “compartment” in our lives sometimes reserved for Sunday’s or specific times only, and not necessarily spilling over to our daily living. Let’s ask again, “How am I doing in obedience to God everyday and at all times?”

Our own will fights “conforming” and “complying,” and in our minds we might say “what if I don’t?” or “I would rather do this or that.” Or perhaps we agree with “we should do that,” but then quickly move on to life at hand and forget that which we **intended**. I have been reading about the underlying importance of integrity in our leaders. Leadership has been described as both an inclination and commitment to the good of others followed by action to see this come about. Do you notice the elements of both **intention** and **action** as fundamental properties of the quality of integrity? How much more so for “obedience?”

I do pray for an infusion of faith to both hear the Word of God daily in the Sacred Scripture, and through the power of grace, to bend my will from the things that are naturally on my heart, to the thoughts and actions that God himself has created me to do. This sounds personal doesn’t it?—that God would have thoughts and intentions for my life revealed through Sacred Scripture, but yet that is what Scripture says. I am created with purpose, that God empowers me through the Holy Spirit, as I turn my own will over to obeying God cooperating with grace. That my own heart will be transformed so that it **acts** out of the love of the father more and more in this habit of obedience.

This season of Lent is a time I look forward to every year in conditioning my heart for works in which God intends for me to be active. This cycle of examination consists of “putting off sin” and “putting on the things of God,” of acting out of an overflowing love in action. In **prayer**, seeking the will and understanding of God; in **fasting** where the body is trained by foregoing its natural impulses and wants, a “putting off” to make me primed for the “putting on;” and by **giving**, outpouring my life for the good and interest of others.

So, obedience becomes more like being rightly ordered or rightly oriented. How could it be otherwise when we walk with the Creator of all that is seen and unseen? He who is about what matters and who gives meaning to life itself. To “obey” or align my life with God takes a whole new dimension as I allow my mind to soak in this reality!

Blessed Lent, and may your heart be well-prepared for the overflowing joy of Easter and walking in faith through “obedience to Christ” throughout the year!

*Henry Abeyta became Director of Emmaus Journey in January 2012. With its establishment as a tax exempt 501c(3) organization in 2014, Henry has served as its President. He and Darlene are the proud parents of two married sons and proud grandparents of four grandsons. Henry retired from Sandia National Laboratories where he worked for 30 years. He and Darlene are long-time members of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque.*



Henry Abeyta

# Pondering Pope Francis' General Audience

By Mike Biggins

*Let's take a few moments to reflect on some of the teachings from Pope Francis' General Audience, June 27, 2018.*

*"Gratitude is a characteristic trait of the heart visited by the Holy Spirit; to obey God we must first remember his benefits."*

As a Christian I take time to reflect on all the blessings the Father provided me. I wake up every morning thinking about how fortunate I am. I have a place to sleep. I have indoor plumbing and water to drink and can shower. I go the kitchen and can find something to eat. The list of things to be grateful for is long. I wonder if everyone is aware of all the blessing we've received from our generous Father or do we just take these blessings for granted?

How do I express my thankfulness for all the blessings the Father provides me? I like to take a few moments each morning and night to reflect on the ways God provides for me. Also, it's important for me to understand what God expects from me given the blessings He's given me. Early in life my father spoke to me about being responsible and my responsibility to give back as I've received. He often spoke in terms of time, talent and treasure, and I've always been amazed he shared this with me and not my siblings, none have any recollection of him ever speaking of this.



*"Placing the law before the relationship does not help the journey of faith. How can a young person want to be Christian, if we start with obligations, responsibilities, consistency and not with liberation? But being Christian is a journey of liberation! The Commandments free you from your selfishness and free you because it is God's love that leads you forward."*

Is my attendance at Mass a result of my sense of "duty"? There have been times in my life when attending Mass was out of a sense of obligation. And, when going to confession once a year was done because the Church required it. I know I'm not alone, not the only person to feel this way. Over time and through God's grace I've come to realize I thirst for the grace I receive through His Word and the Eucharist at Mass.

Next, I choose to focus on the Sacrament of Penance, why? Because this is one of the most difficult actions for me to do as a Christian. Confessing my sins to another person has always been difficult. Yet, I've come to realize if I chose to avoid the sacrament of Penance, I choose not to receive the grace and forgiveness Christ offers.

*"Only by accepting God's offer of love Christians are able to enjoy true freedom and an abundant life".*

This simple sentence offers an opportunity to reflect on several things. What is true freedom? What is the abundant life Francis is alluding to here? Do I truly believe God loves me? Do I accept He sent His only son to die on the cross for me? And, do I believe God's commandments guide me on my journey to salvation?

**Listening to what the Church teaches, as in this case we have listened to Pope Francis, can be both informative and growth enhancing—if we listen with both mind and heart.**

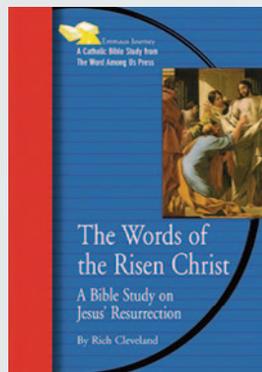
# The Words of the Risen Christ

## Enter Into the Hearts and Minds of the Disciples

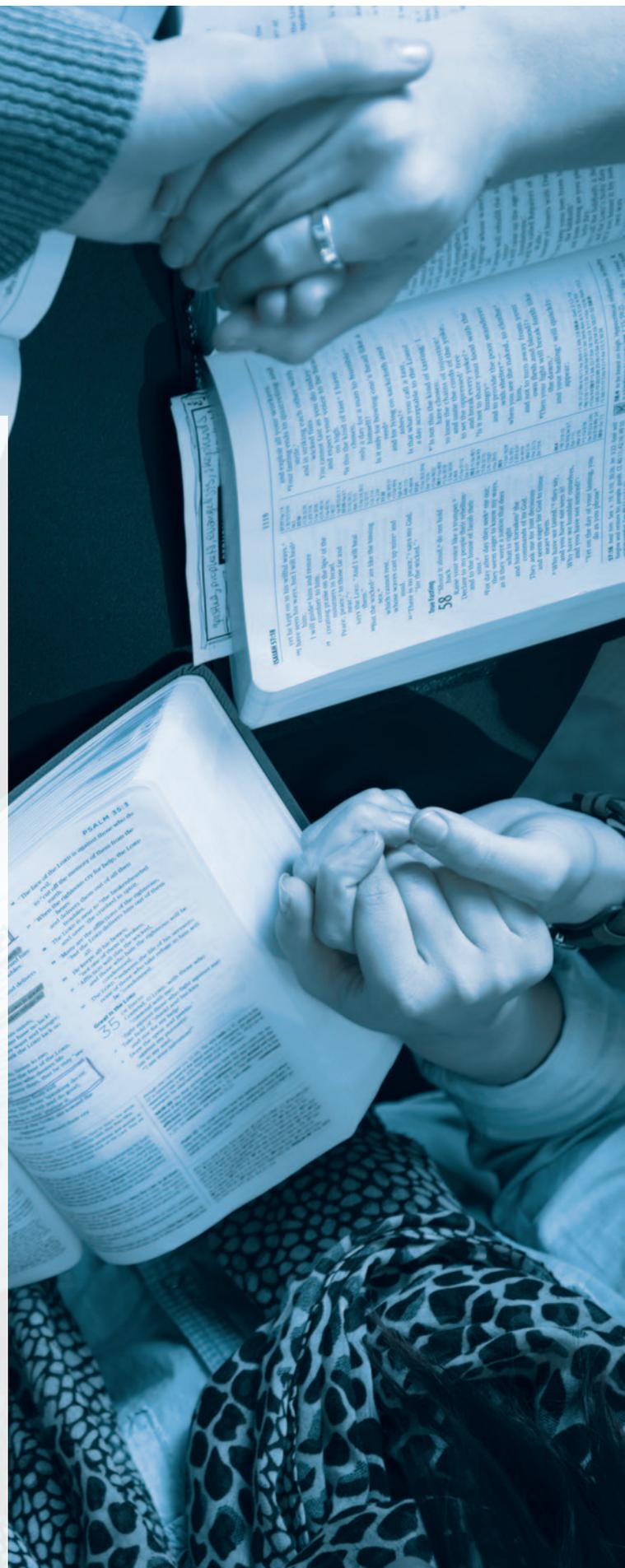
*The Words of the Risen Christ* will enable you and your small groups to enter into the hearts and minds of the disciples as they joyfully discover that Jesus is not dead but has risen.

### **The Words of the Risen Christ** consists of eight enlightening sessions:

- Session 1 — “That the world may know ...”
- Session 2 — “Was it not necessary ...?”
- Session 3 — “Peace be with you.”
- Session 4 — “Do not be faithless, but believing.”
- Session 5 — “Come and have breakfast.”
- Session 6 — “Do you love me?”
- Session 7 — “I send the promise of my Father upon you.”
- Session 8 — “Go and make disciples of all nations.”



Written as a follow-up study to *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, participants of this study will resonate with the disciples as they come to grips with their disappointments and shortcomings. And they will also exult with these same disciples when they experience Jesus' love, forgiveness, and companionship.



## Topic: Obedience to Christ

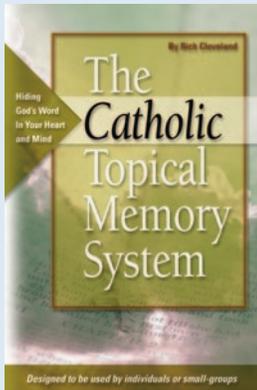
Verses: Romans 12:2 and John 14:21

### Reflection on the Wisdom of the Church

Obedience is often viewed by us in the same way as “submission.” In our American culture, we have elevated personal freedom as the one right which we dare not relinquish. Consequently, we often see any authority as an infringement upon

our freedom, and resist submitting in obedience to anyone or anything unless the consequence of not doing so compels us. Unfortunately, this insistence on personal freedom often negatively affects our Christian life by deceiving us into thinking that obedience to God is optional and that we can pick and choose which of God’s desires we will obey.

As long as we see obedience as requiring us to submit to something or someone unpleasant, we will struggle with living our new life in Christ...



### Questions for Meditation

#### Romans 12:2

- How does conformity to the world express itself?
- Why do our minds have to be transformed before we can recognize and do God’s will?
- How does Scripture memory help us to transform our minds?

#### John 14:21

- What is the proof of our love to God?
- According to this verse, what responsibilities do you have?
- What is the difference between *having* his commandments and *keeping* them?
- What is the promise(s) of John 14:21?
- What is the relationship between obedience and doing God’s will?

### A Life of Obedience *continued from front page*

The father’s response to the two sons is interesting. Speaking to the angry son, he said “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours....” This introduces the concept of reward for obedience, especially obedience from a loving heart. God’s abiding presence in our life makes all our obedience worthwhile as Jesus makes explicitly clear in John 14:21–23; “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. ... If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” The primary reward for loving and obeying Jesus and his Words is that both the Son and the Father will indwell us with their presence and will enable us to come to know them better—obedience is rewarded with increasing illumination.

Secondly the father’s response to the self-indulgent son teaches us another lesson about obedience. As the father goes on to explain to his angry son, “It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.” Whether we have spent most of our Christian life trying to love and follow Jesus in obedience, or whether we have struggled with disobedience by living for ourselves, the message is clear that God is ready for us to return at any time. A decision to return and live a life of obedience to the Father will always be met with warmth, joy, and celebration. We who have lived apart can return and immediately begin to experience the rewards of obedience.

In the early stages of endeavoring to live a life of obedience we frequently fail to even meet our own acceptable standards,

and it can become quite discouraging. Therefore, it is important to both keep our eyes on the prize, getting to know God better, and to recognize the reality that as Christians we are re-born for a life of obedience—as we do what we were created for, life will become easier. Cardinal John Henry Newman suggests that obedience should become a habit, or a *natural* way of living: “A religious man, in proportion as obedience becomes more and more easy to him, will doubtless do his duty unconsciously. It will be *natural* to him to obey, and therefore he will do it *naturally*, i.e, without effort or deliberation. ... This is the noble manner of serving God, to do good without thinking about it, without any calculation or reasoning, from love of the good, and hatred of the evil;—though cautiously and with prayer and watching, yet so generously, that if we were suddenly asked why we so act, we could only reply ‘because it is our way’, or ‘because Christ so acted’; so spontaneously as not to know so much that we *are* doing right as that we are *not* doing wrong; I mean, with more of instinctive fear of sinning than of minute and careful appreciation of *degrees* of our obedience.”<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 40:8<sup>2</sup> says, “I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.” So, may it be.

*Rich Cleveland is the founder of Emmaus Journey and was its first Director. He and his wife continue to serve Emmaus Journey, and live in Colorado*

1. *The Heart of Newman*, A Synthesis Arranged by Erich Przywara, S.J., page 373–374  
2. Scriptures used in this article come from the *Revised Standard Version* as found at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/r/rsv/browse.html>.