



Can our disobedience hinder the ministry of Jesus to others? It would appear so based on this week's Gospel (Mk 1:40-45). After healing a leper Jesus instructed him, "See that you tell no one anything." In response, what did the now healed leper do? – "The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad." Obviously, he was disobedient to Jesus' instructions. What was the outcome? "He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere." Thus, it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town because of the disobedience of the leper. There is an important lesson here: our spiritual life is not ours alone, it affects everyone around us for good or for ill. We might respond: "This is not fair! Why should I suffer because of someone else's disobedience?" Or, "Why should others suffer because of my disobedience!" Fair or not, we all know this is reality, it happens every day!

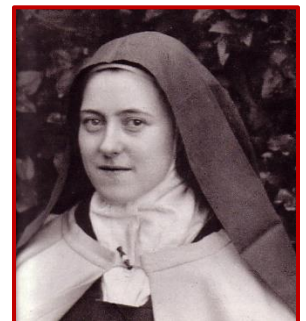
The more we think about this fact of life, the more we realize the true nature of sin (i.e. acts of disobedience to God): sin is not only offensive to God, but it is always selfish, uncharitable, and even harmful to others. In fact, we could say that sin is offensive to God precisely because it damages the people whom He created and loves with an infinite love: it damages both the one who sins and all who are associated with him/her. Our purpose here, of course, is not to drive into despair those of us who are very conscious of our sins, rather, to motivate us to turn away from sin by revealing its true hideous, anti-God, anti-life, nature. If we do not realize the true horror of our sin, we will never realize the depths of God's mercy and love. Our forgiveness was gained for us at the highest price: Jesus was slain and by His blood we were purchased by God (Rev 5:9, 1 Cor 6:20, 7:23). If you think I am exaggerating the destructive force of sin, look closely at a crucifix and ask the suffering Christ whether or not your sins are significant!

Finally, yes, disobedience is terribly destructive, but at the same time, and in the same measure, obedience is divinely powerful and fruitful! I leave you with the inspiring example given by the father of one of the greatest Saints of modern times, St. Therese, the Little Flower. The faithfulness, obedience, of this man is undoubtedly one of the root causes of the making of this great Saint. Here are some of St. Therese's childhood memories of her father as she recorded them in her autobiography:

What shall I say of the winter evenings at home, especially the Sunday evenings? Ah! How I loved, after the game of checkers was over, to sit with Celine on Papa's knees. He used to sing, in his beautiful voice, airs that filled the soul with profound thoughts, or else, rocking us gently, he recited poems which taught the eternal truths. Then we all went upstairs to say our night prayers together and the little Queen [Therese] was alone near her King [father], having only to look at him to see how the saints pray. When prayer was ended we came according to age to bid Papa good night and receive his kiss; the Queen naturally came last and the King took her by the two elbows to kiss her and she would cry out in a high-pitched tone: "Good night, Papa, good night and sleep well!" Every evening was a repetition of the same thing.

She gives additional details of fond memories – playing with her father, going for walks, visiting the Blessed Sacrament with him, and while attending Mass:

. . . I looked more frequently at Papa than at the preacher, for his handsome face said so much to me! His eyes, at times, were filled with tears which he tried in vain to stop; he seemed no longer held by earth, so much did his soul love to lose itself in the eternal truths. . . . I would never come to an end if I really wanted to portray a thousand little actions like this which crowd into my memory. How could I possibly express the tenderness which "Papa" showered upon his Queen? **There are things the heart feels but which the tongue and even the mind cannot express.**



The obedience of St. Therese's father obviously opened her heart to God, and as a result, the universal Church and the entire world has benefitted immensely and for all eternity!! Yes, disobedience can hinder the ministry of Jesus; but ah! Behold the power of obedience!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples