

Proper 18, September 7, 2025

Obedience.

Obedience defined appears in all of our readings this morning.

We trust in you with all our heart, no matter what you ask of us.

Be obedient to my ways and you will have found life.

Don't be distracted by what others tell you; focus on my law.

I have confidence in your obedience to me, and know you will do the right thing.

How obedient must I be? You must be obedient to me beyond your obedience to even the most beloved of your family members, beyond the loyalty you have for your family unit, yes beyond even the preservation of your own life.

I admit to have been distracted this week by the word "hate." I just don't expect to hear that from Jesus, tender-meek-and-mild – even Jesus flipping over the money tables - and searched Google for other translations of the text which might have softened the edges, but very few did – out of 20 or so, maybe three. This is the Jesus who instructs us to love one another as he loves us, even to love our enemy. As we celebrate and honor our mother or father or sister or brother or child or spouse at the time of their death, we hear Paul's words: nothing will separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ. Love is the answer. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. But today, Jesus is challenging that deep, broad, profound love in his use of the word "hate," a word whose very sound resembles a door slamming shut. And that's exactly Jesus' point when he says it must be even as if you hate the very people you would rush into a burning house to rescue, those whom God has commanded that you honor and love, if you want to follow me: you must be ready to put your love for them aside and give up everyone and everything.

When I re-visit the words with which I opened – trust in me for your life, don't listen to any voice but mine, do the right thing by me – I'm stopped in my tracks as I listen to and watch the present climate of thought and behavior around me. I am hearing those exact words, but from the earthly powers that be: from those in our midst who daily declare their righteousness, their ownership of truth, demanding our total allegiance. Just as God told Moses he had a choice between curses or blessings: if you choose cursings and turn to other gods, you will meet death, face-to-face; but if you choose those things for which I will bless you, you will have life – we are hearing this all around us today. But it is not the God our Father-in-heaven speaking to us, but rather the voice of human beings who would be God. My prayer for all of us is that when we hear such things from our fellow humans, may the voice of God interrupt and mightily distract us, calling us away from those other gods, to obedience to the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and not to any one human being. May we yearn to have God's only Son – human yet fully divine – distract us and interfere with

every aspect of our lives: in the words of Psalm 139, be our going out and our coming in, our sitting down and our rising up, in our journeys and in our resting-places. We must fervently pray that God through Jesus press on us from every side - behind us and before us - that Jesus be the hand that guides us away from our devices and desires to the peace of God that passes all understanding. As Christians – creatures of God and disciples of Christ – we live in two worlds; the most beautiful moments are those times when the souls of those two worlds touch one another and unite in love. Unfortunately, much of our time is spent with the kingdom of this world clashing with God's Kingdom and as Christians we simply cannot realistically escape that. But we can and do ask to be instruments of God's peace and to sow love where there is hatred, joy where there is sadness, union where there is discord.

*Grant us, O Holy God, to trust in you with all our hearts, and to resist the proud who trust in their own strength, in the name of Jesus Christ, your only Son, our Savior.*