TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A

Obedience in words and actions

27th September 2026

Ezekiel 18:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32.

It's been great week of grace. On Thursday 9/24 was the beautification mass for now Blessed Fulton John Sheen with 850 seminarians, 850 nuns, 260 deacons, about 1300 priests, 89 bishops, over 50,000 worshippers gathered at the dome at the American center St Loius Missouri for the mass including millions of online viewers all over the world. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle (prefect of the dicastery for the evangelization of people) was Pope Leo's representative.

In his homily, Cardinal Tagle extolled the virtues of Archbishop Fulton Sheen including love for the mission, humility, active use of modern communication in evangelization (radio, TV, writing several books), deep life of prayer centered around Eucharistic adoration, and love for the poor. He reminded all what constitutes blessedness and mission (Matt 28:19-20). One of the famous lines of that very powerful 23minutes homily was "Just as only a wounded Christ could convert a doubting Thomas, so also a Church wounded by poverty is required to convert a doubting world". Wa oh!

Blessed Fulton Sheen took up his own challenge by giving the poor in charity financial proceeds from his remuneration and animating the USA church towards mission to the poor church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America through financial donations.

For Sheen, caring for the poor was not an ideological propaganda but an imperative for a faithful following of Christ. It involves the joining of the Church and the mission; and of the conversion of hearts inspired by the Holy spirit.

Again, tomorrow 9/27 is the Solemnity of SVP (1581-1660) for us. The Apostle of charity and Patron saint of all works of charity. He is our Father Founder. At his funeral homily (1660), Bishop Henri Maupas said of St Vincent 'he just about transformed the face of the Church'. St Vincent was born in Pouy, Southern France to a poor peasant farmer on April 24, 1581.

In 1600(at 19years) he was ordained a priest. He was ambitious for financial benefices; but after his capture and freedom from captivity in Tunisia (1604-1607) he gradually realized that God was calling him to serve the poor.

With the experience of Galley slaves while serving as tutor to the kids of De Gondi family, and as Pastor of the parishes in Chatillon Les Dombes and Clichy St Vincent was fully converted to seeing Christ in the poor and suffering (evangelizer of the poor). He will later insist that the poor are our Lords and Master. They continue to be the sacrament of Christ's presence in the world for in serving them, the poor, we serve the Son of God!!

St Vincent in 1617 gathered wealthy French ladies into a huge association known as Ladies of charity. In 1625, he established the congregation of the Mission (Vincentian Fathers), and in 1633 he co-founded the religious sisters, the daughters of charity of St Vincent the Paul with St Louise de Marillac. The saint behind the apparitions of our Lady of the Miraculous medal (1830), St Catherine Laboure DC, is also a Vincentian.

Two centuries later, Blessed Frederick Ozanam (1833) would found the society of St Vincent the Paul and placed it under the patronage of St Vincent de Paul. The weather led to the cancellation of the Walk for the Poor organized annually by the society of St Vincent de Paul here on Long Island.

Our closest link to St Vincent is the two priests in our parish and the priests at St John's University. They are all Vincentian priests.

Let us pray for the grace to be always generous and sensitive to the needs of the poor (Lk 4:18).

The two sons of today's gospel passage (Matt 21:28-32) are not the ideal sons that a man should have. Both never matched their words with action nor followed through their initial convictions. When the father asked both to go to the vineyard and work; the first refused but later repented and went like some naughty kids at home do while the second agreed but did not go. Those two sons would have driven their dad crazy.

The ideal would be to obey the father and go to the vineyard and work. Both sons displayed some form of filial entitlement which is the bane of our age. Many teenagers expect so much from their parents with so much entitlement and yet will be unwilling to pull their own of the rope by being obedient and doing their chores at home as at when due. Obedience involves words and actions, separating the two renders it incomplete and unacceptable. This is why the first reading (Ezk 18:25-28) pointed out that, righteous deeds bring life while unjust actions bring death. When the righteous join the crowd to be bad, their current state will be the basis of divine judgment. There are no half measures in obedience!

Jesus used the story of the two sons in the Gospel to differentiate between the hypocrisy of the elders and the Pharisees and, the compliance of the tax-collectors and prostitutes to the repentance announced by John the Baptist (Matt 4:7-11). The Pharisees and the elders said an initial yes but did not follow through of God's command, while the tax-collectors and the prostitutes said no initially through sin and immorality but had a rethink/conversion of heart and turned to righteousness.

The message for us therefore is to obey God in word and in action. And to achieve this, Jesus showed us an example described by St Paul in the second reading (Phil 2:5-11). According to St Paul, Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8) (kenosis-self emptying).

Thus, through humility one can reconcile words with actions in total obedience to God. For a humble person has no reason to disobey instructions and has every reason to obey. The Psalmist said that God guides the humble in right judgement (Ps 25:9). As such, the humble person lives above the filial entitlement mentality that holds sway among many present-day Catholics. This mentality celebrates mercy to the detriment of obedience.

Therefore, beloved friends, let us approach God in humility and pray that He will teach us His ways like St Vincent and Blessed Fulton J. Sheen to always match our obedience with positive actions.

Lord, teach us obedience in words and actions, Amen.