

- *Wisdom of the Catechism* - from the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- *Thoughtful Questions* - questions to ask yourself and to bring to prayer

## Works, Motives, and the "Obedience of Faith"

Jerry Johnson

**"Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles, among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."**

**Romans 1:5-6**

Just what is this "obedience of faith" that Paul is speaking of? He doesn't actually give us a definition, but the Catechism of the Catholic Church describes it this way: "By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer." (CCC 143) It is a total submission of our lives, both mind and actions, to our creator. As Mary did, we are to give our fiat, our yes Lord, let it be done to me according to your word. The term "obedience of faith" also shows a definite relationship between our "works" (obedience) and our faith. It seems to fit the relationship St. James describes when he writes "... Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works." (James 2:18) The catechism goes on to say that Abraham is the model of such obedience. It's interesting to note that both St. Paul and St. James use Abraham as an example, but each with a little different emphasis. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminds us that "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3) with the emphasis on Abraham's belief. James, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on Abraham's works when he writes



"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by the works." (James 2:21,22) From these examples we

see Abraham giving us the whole picture of faith as it relates to our works. His firm belief led him to the act of obedience, which according to St. James, completed his faith.

In looking at the "obedience of faith" from yet another angle we see the importance of a right motive (in this case, faith) for our actions (in this case, obedience). We have motives for nearly everything we do or even think. We even have motives behind our motives. Hence the term "ulterior motives". Some of these motives are good and pure, but some can be very selfish and downright sinful. Jesus gives us an example of this in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (page 2). In this parable we see a very obedient Pharisee with very bad motives. Behind his obedience lies a pride and arrogance that turn that obedience into an occasion of sin. In the final analysis, Jesus tells us that the repentant tax collector goes home justified, rather than the obedient Pharisee. Lets take a look at another example we can all probably relate to. Have you ever

done something good for someone else but with an ulterior motive of receiving a favor in return? These underlying motives can taint what appears on the surface to be a very kind or generous act on our part. Not all secondary motives are bad, however. We can often have many good motives for our thoughts or actions. This is pointed out each time we say the Act of Contrition. "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee. And I detest all my sins (a repentant attitude) because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell (a pretty good motive for repentance). But most of all (a better motive coming up) because I offend thee my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love...". This also points us to the greatest motive of all. "So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1Cor13:13) Love is the ultimate motive. But just what is this love that the Scriptures speak of and that God calls us to? This pure motive that is reached through that complete submission of our lives to God which we call "the obedience of faith". Next month we will examine that question. Until then, let's take a deeper look at our own motives for what we do or think so that all of our thoughts and actions may be pleasing to our heavenly Father!

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert's and catechist for more than 20 years. He chairs the St. Lambert Faith Formation Committee and is currently in the Master Catechist Training program of the diocese.

## WISDOM OF THE CATECHISM

### From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

“Repentance (also called contrition) must be inspired by motives that arise from faith. If repentance arises from love of charity for God, it is called “perfect” contrition; if it is founded on other motives, it is called “imperfect.” (CCC 1492)

“...The intention is a movement of the will toward the end: it is concerned with the goal of the activity. It aims at the good anticipated from the action undertaken. Intention is not limited to directing individual actions, but can guide several actions toward one and the same purpose; it can orient one’s whole life toward its ultimate end. For example, a service done with the end of helping one’s neighbor can at the same time be inspired by the love of

God as the ultimate end of all our actions. One and the same action can also be inspired by several intentions, such as performing a service in order to obtain a favor or to boast about it.” (CCC 1752)

“A good intention (for example, that of helping one’s neighbor) does not make behavior that is intrinsically disordered, such as lying and calumny, good or just. The end does not justify the means. Thus the condemnation of an innocent person cannot be justified as a legitimate means of saving the nation. On the other hand, an added bad intention (such as vainglory) makes an act evil that, in and of itself, can be good (such as almsgiving).” (CCC 1753)

### Thoughtful Questions

1. What is the state of conversion in my life? Am I seeking God and submitting my life to him?
2. Do my motives for what I do and say reflect my love for God and others?

## SCRIPTURE SPEAKS



### The Pharisee and the tax collector

“Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a

Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity--greedy, dishonest, adulterous--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week,

and I pay tithes on my whole income.’ But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 18:10-14

“If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-3