



Letter to order the reading of St Ignatius' Letter on Obedience (4th October 1875)

Moreover, among all the virtues I wish for you, the virtue of obedience is the first and even the only truly indispensable one, because nothing can replace it and it alone can guarantee all the others. From the bottom of my heart, I address these words that the holy Founder of the Company of Jesus addressed to his first disciples:

Though hard to bear, I admit that other Religious Orders surpass us in fasts, in night vigils and other bodily austerities, which every one of them performs devoutly according to the spirit of the Rule. However, in relation to the excellence of obedience, the complete abandonment of the will and individual judgement, I ardently wish, my very dear brothers, that all those who serve our Lord and God in this Company yield to none. Let this virtue become the hallmark that distinguishes the true and legitimate offspring of the Company from those who are not, so that they do not consider the person to whom they give obedience, but that they see in that person Jesus Christ Our Lord, on whose behalf they obey. Moreover, indeed, if one has to obey the superior, it is not at all in view of his prudence, his goodness or other qualities with which God may have endowed him, but only because he is God's lieutenant and acts by the authority of him who said, 'The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me', (Lk 10:16). If, on the contrary, he appears lacking in prudence and wisdom, it is not a reason to obey him with less thoroughness, since in his capacity as superior he represents the One whose wisdom is infallible and who will make up in himself for all that is lacking in his minister, either in virtue, or other qualities. Indeed, Jesus Christ, having said explicitly, '...the Scribes and Pharisees possess the Chair of Moses,' immediately added, '...therefore, observe and do exactly what they tell you, but do not do as they do.'

In thus proposing to you the virtue of obedience as proper and specific to your Society, I cannot prevent myself, again in fear and trembling, of recalling these words of the Holy Spirit which ought to make you all tremble too: '...See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: a blessing, if you obey... a curse, if you disobey (Dt 11:26-28).'

Now, since it is a mistake to meditate on the virtue of obedience and understand its necessity, its worth and its condition and then fail too often to apply it, I felt the need, my very dear Sons, of particularly recommending this essential meditation to you. To make it easy for you, I thought it would be good that each of you keep to hand a little manual in which all that is best and most useful about this virtue would be in it. I found nothing better than the Letter of Saint Ignatius on Obedience, of which I have just called to mind a passage for you. You will find it at the end of this present Letter, printed in the same format as your Rules, because I want it to be for you an appendix and a detailed supplement.

I wish it to be read and explained, twice a year during the noviciate, once after the general retreat and the second time during the Lenten season. I wish, you all would read it again, time to time, during the days following the reading of your Rules that you must do in common in all your Houses. Finally, I wish you to reread it and meditate on it during your annual retreats. Furthermore, you could take the topic of one of the meditations for each day. For this reason, I have divided it into eight headings that correspond to each day of your retreat.

I feel sure that if you are faithful to these practices, you will enter into the paramount importance of this virtue and soon, by the grace of God, you will become perfectly obedient and consequently perfect Missionaries. May Our Lord, who wished to be our role model in becoming obedient until death, grant you this grace and keep you in his Sacred Heart.

