

explorers. Consider the goal to build a base on the moon or to land people on Mars. What determination for mastery! Are we not collectively or individually striving for perfection? Should we not try, equally hard to bring to perfection the Christian spirit within us? Is not perfection in Christian virtue incomparably greater and more important than skill in worldly matters? True greatness is becoming like God, fully developing His image hidden within us. What could be greater than to become more and more like Him, Who is the highest of all beings? For this reason greatness in virtue is real and not only apparent as in the case of worldly greatness. For a person is only truly great when he is great in the eyes of God. And this means the attainment of virtue in its highest form. God will measure our worth by the standard of perfection only. Therefore, if you want to become a truly great person of genuine worth, you must not be satisfied with becoming a mediocre, but rather a perfect Christian.

If you are, or if you strive to become a perfect Christian, you will reap the extraordinary benefits of God's love and pleasure, in a special way. For God loves most those who are most like Himself. The more perfect in the genuine Christian spirit you become, the more like God you will become and the greater will be His love for you, for everyone loves that which is like himself. Are not the saints God's greatest friends? As proof of His love, He poured out His graces upon them. What intimate contact He had with them! And what more could we desire than to be loved very specially by God, by Him Who is the King of kings, the Highest of the high, the Mightiest of the mighty, the Noblest of the noble, the Kindest of all the kind, the most Faithful of the faithful, the Lord over time and eternity? To be the recipient of such a love would provide the greatest possible happiness, a hidden life without worry, the greatest security

we could possibly have in this life, in a word, peace.

Even beyond the grave – The only things we will take with us into the next world will be our sins or our virtues, nothing else. Our virtues alone will gain for us the everlasting contemplation of God and His unchanging love. Eternal rewards and admission to the Marriage Feast will be given according to the degree of perfection, which we attained in this life on earth. 1 Peter 2:1 tells us that, here below we are only 'aliens and exiles.' We are all travelers putting up at the inn of this world for a very short time. Soon, we will all leave this world and hopefully travel the road to God. We need to gather treasures, which will not be consumed by rust and moths, treasures possessing value in the eyes of God! Yes, we need treasures, an abundance of treasures. Since, according to St. Paul, the runners in the race risk all to win the prize, how much more is this true for us to whom eternal rewards are at the end of the race? In 1 Cor. 9:25, St. Paul states, "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

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Obedience and the Passion of Christ

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On December 12, 2003, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I was privileged to attend a showing of Mel Gibson's, *The Passion of the Christ*, starring Jim Caviezel, as Jesus.

The movie opens with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying, while the Apostles Peter, James, and John slept. He had said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:38-39 RSVCE). The movie vividly depicted the torment of Christ during these moments in the garden. On the one hand, Jesus knew full well the fate that awaited him and in his humanity was in anguish and exceedingly fearful. On the other, He knew in His heart that he had to undergo the coming humiliation in order to reconcile mankind with God, and so submitted to the will of His Father.

This movie is a vividly stunning portrayal of the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus, the Christ. It shows man at his worst and Jesus at His best. As Jesus is undergoing this intense suffering, He is reminded of previous experiences, which are depicted as flashbacks. There are some poignant moments, for example, Jesus falling as a child and His Blessed Mother, Mary running to his side to comfort Him and the institution of the Eucharistic banquet at the Last Supper.

We also see Peter's denial, Caiaphas' hardness of heart, Pilate's dilemma, Judas' death, and Saint Veronica wiping the face of Jesus with her veil during His journey to Calvary. The cloth she used preserved the

bloody imprint of Christ's features. Primarily, the movie depicts Christ's Passion as never before. One scene depicts Simon of Cyrene assisting Jesus in carrying the cross. As Jesus is brutally hauled up from the ground to once again take up the cross He embraces it, as though He knows that it will be the instrument, which will reconcile the world. It is graphic, disturbing, and heart wrenching. Some may be offended because of its truthfulness, in the same sense that some are offended by seeing the horrid results of a child torn limb from limb during an abortion. Yet, this is a movie that every adult should see, again and again. It is a sobering movie that will stay with me for a long time, as I will never again look at the crucified Christ in the same way.

In *The Passion of the Christ* we see the depth of Christ's obedience; here we see obedience at its best; here we see obedience personified; here we see an example, which should inspire every one of us to be obedient to the Church as Jesus was obedient to His Father.

In obedience, as in everything, Christ is our perfect model. Obedience brought Him into the world; obedience led Him through childhood and youth; obedience led Him through the hardships and heartaches of His public life; obedience led Him to give His time and energy to everyone He met; obedience led Him to submit Himself to the sufferings of that first Good Friday. He died – in obedience.

But the supreme act of obedience, which was witnessed on that cross, was not the result of a sudden decision. Christ learned to obey by obeying. During the first thirty years of His life He was subject to Mary and Joseph, though He knew infinitely more than they did. Obedience to parents, teachers, superiors and elders is hard, especially for young people. They hate to be bossed around. They want their own way. The

youth of today might well remember the example of obedience set by Jesus.

Christ's public life was planned according to the will of His Father. In prayer and retreat Jesus kept in contact with what His Father wanted. Men and women in all walks of life chafe and complain under office rules, traffic laws, city ordinances, parish regulations, and Church laws. In all this Jesus gave us the perfect example. He was submissive to all lawful authority. He obeyed the commands and precepts of the prophets. He conformed to the ritual and ceremony of the Jewish religion. He paid taxes and demanded that His followers do the same. He respected the government and its officials, even though they were not always worthy of respect. Jesus was a perfect example of what we call today a law-abiding citizen.

The human will and the human nature of Christ recoiled from the tortures of the passion. Nevertheless, He made His choice: "Not my will, that is, not my human will, but Yours, Your divine will, let that be done." He wanted the divine will carried out at all costs, even at the bitter price of being tied and dragged with ropes, of being struck on the cheek, of being made a mockery by Herod, of being unmercifully scourged at the pillar, of being crowned with thorns, of carrying the cross, and of being nailed to it. All this was done in obedience.

Do we as Christians sincerely endeavor to live a life in obedience to the Divine Will? Christ calls us to perfection. "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). In these words Our Savior encourages us. He is not content with His Christians being merely good; He wants us to excel above all others. To quote Phil. 2:15, He wants us to, shine as lights of Heaven in this world, as children of God, worthy of the Father, without criticism, in the midst of a crooked and wicked generation, to be wholly and entirely

what we should be; in other words, He wants us to be perfect.

The Apostles also encourage us not to limit ourselves to what is necessary, but to increase in goodness daily. 2 Peter 3:18 tells us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." And in 1 Peter 2:2 he says, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation." St. Paul tell us in Col. 1: 9-10, "we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" And in Col. 1:22 St. Paul tells us that we have been, "reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present us holy and blameless and irreproachable before God." Christ shall not only take possession of all hearts to some extent, but as it states in Col. 1:28, "Him, we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ." Everywhere we find the challenge not to be satisfied with what is barely necessary, but to develop fully what is Christ-like in us.

Should these challenges to perfection be necessary for us? All nature strives after perfection? Does the acorn remain an acorn? Does the seed of corn remain a seed? Does the root of the rosebush remain a mere root? Certainly not, they strive to completely develop all the possibilities within them — the acorn to become an oak tree, the root, a rosebush covered with beautiful flowers.

All human life is governed by this urge towards progress. As a people we endeavor to advance in culture and skill. We go to great lengths to progress as a nation. The enormous amount of trouble taken by inventors, the great efforts made by athletes, astronauts, or