

WE MUST HONOR OUR PARENTS

—by St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite—

Jesus Christ, the Lord and God of all, to Whom every creature and all of creation submit, remained obedient to His parents. This is truly remarkable! But if we carefully consider the persons whom He obeyed, the duration of His submission, and the extent of His obedience, we will stand awestruck before the unsurpassed and unparalleled obedience displayed by Christ.

The Lord's obedience was extraordinary, firstly, on account of the people to whom He submitted Himself. Indeed, it would have sufficed if the Lord obeyed only His Most-holy mother; for she was His biological mother who conceived Him from her immaculate flesh, who carried Him for nine entire months in her womb, and who later nurtured Him with her milk. Consequently, He had a mandatory obligation to obey her, not only because He was her genuine and true Son, but also because He was the Law-giver Himself Who had commanded the following: **“Honor your father and mother that it may be well with you, and your days may be long upon the good land” (Ex. 20:12); “Hear my son, the instruction of your father, and do not reject the laws of your mother” (Pr. 1:9); “He who honors his father atones for his sins; and he who honors his mother is like one who stores up treasure. He who honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays, he will be heard. He who honors his father will have a long life, and he who obeys the Lord will give rest to his mother; and he will serve his parents as his masters. Honor your father and mother in word and deed, that a blessing may come upon you from him” (Sir. 3:6).** The Lord, however, chose to be obedient even to Righteous Joseph, despite the fact that He was neither required nor obligated to do so. Joseph was not Christ's true, biological father; the Lord Jesus was not Joseph's genuine, natural son. Joseph's fatherhood and Christ's sonship were both a portrayal, not an actuality. Their father-son relationship was assumed to be and referred to as true kinship, but in essence it was not real. Despite this, the Lord desiring to display an extraordinary level of obedience submitted Himself indiscriminately and listened not only to His true mother but also to His supposed father Joseph, as if he was His real father. This is why St. Luke the Evangelist stated **“Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and subjected Himself to them” (Lk. 2:51).**

Second, the Lord's obedience was extraordinary on account of the prolonged length of time He submitted Himself. For according to the forty-second canon of the Synod in Carthage (rather, according to all natural and civil laws), children must remain obedient and subject to their parents until they reach a rational age when they are able to discern between good and

Translated by

ST. NEKTARIOS MONASTERY

—ROSCOE, NY—

evil. This is usually until the age of eighteen, or at the most twenty, (according to the twenty second chapter of the book of Numbers), depending on each person's innate sharpness and maturity or obtuseness of the mind. Once people reach such an age, they are released from their obligation to submit themselves to and obey their parents, and henceforth they acquire their independence and freedom.

The Lord Jesus Christ, however, was not satisfied with remaining obedient to His parents for only such a time span. On the contrary! He obeyed His supposed father, that is Saint Joseph the Betrothed, for as long as he lived in this present world. Whereas, He remained obedient to His true and natural mother for thirty entire years—almost twice as long as all other children remain obedient to their parents!

This is why the divine beacon, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, when expounding on the phrase, **“Woman, what is it to Me and you? My hour has not yet come” (Jn. 2:4)**, which the Lord directed to His holy mother after His baptism when they were at the wedding in Cana, says that, in a way, the Lord with His reply raised an objection to His mother; for she should have been satisfied with His so many years of protracted obedience to her, and she should not have asked Him at that moment still to obey her and fulfill her request. **“My hour has not yet come?”** That is, “the time has not come yet for Me to acquire independence and freedom?” Nonetheless, even at that moment Christ once again obeyed His mother and carried out what she had asked Him to do, and He turned the water into wine.

The Lord's obedience was extraordinary on account of a third reason: All children throughout history who were obedient to their parents, and all monastics who submitted themselves to their spiritual fathers and elders, every single one of them—without exception—had to exert and force themselves (to a greater or lesser degree) to relinquish their own will and subjugate themselves, because they were all descendants of Adam who had been infected by his disobedience and self-will. The Lord, however, ceaselessly had His human will subjugated to His Divine will; thus, He did not have to force Himself to cut off His will. On the contrary, Christ submitted Himself and obeyed His parents with perfect eagerness, with total volition, with complete love, with absolute humility, without the slightest complaint, without any internal (in thought) or external (with words) objection. The Lord was ready to obey every order and carry out not only light tasks, but even difficult and laborious jobs. He was prepared to take on not only honorable and glorious responsibilities, but even the most insignificant and lowly tasks.

What ineffable humility and submissiveness! He Who with His voice calls the clouds and Whom they at once fearfully obey and begin producing rain, as Job states, **“Will You call a cloud with Your voice, and will it obey**

You with a violent shower of much rain?” (Job 38:34), this same person would immediately obey St. Joseph whenever He was summoned to bring him water to drink. He Who sends lightning forth and Whom they instantly ask, “What do you command?” and begin to go forth, **“Can you send out lightnings, and they shall go? They shall say to you, ‘What do you want?’” (Job 38:35)**, this same person would reply to His holy mother, “What is it dear Mother? I am at your service. Where would you like me to go?” and He would immediately depart whenever she would send Him to bring wood or to light a fire. He Who, according to St. Paul, **“calls those things which do not exist as though they did exist” (Rom. 4:17)**, Who makes everything materialize as soon as He thinks of it, and before Whom all the things He wills immediately appear and ask, “Behold, we are present,” according to the wise Judith: **“For You did those things and the things that occurred before and those that followed after; and You have planned the ones present, and the ones for the future. And the things You have determined present themselves and say, ‘Behold, we are here’” (Jdt. 9:5)**, this same person was ready to carry out immediately all of His parents’ desires and directions. In brief, He Who created every single thing with His word, **“For He spoke, and they came into being; He commanded, and they were created” (Ps. 148:5)**, and Whose command no creation can transgress, **“He has set an ordinance, and it shall not pass away” (Ps. 148:6)**, this same person would obey everything His father and mother would tell Him to do! When he was ordered by them, He would light the fire, He would clean their home, He would set the table, He would wash the cups and dishes, and He would perform all other sorts of lowly tasks and services.

Now, what do we have to say? If the King of the angels was obedient to His parents, in other words, if he was obedient to the mud and clay that He Himself created with His own hands, what must we do?—we who are sinful and worse than a zero? How much obedience should we have toward our physical parents? How much must we honor them? How much should we love them? How much gratitude must we show to them? Every child is obligated to give these four things to his parents, and he, in turn, should receive the following four things from his parents: sustenance, help, instruction, and a good example. Children must especially display a great deal of patience with their parents’ shortcomings during their old age, as it is written: **“My son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him in his life, and if his understanding fails, be considerate and do not dishonor him with all your strength” (Sir. 3:12-13).**

Do not believe, dear reader, that we can possibly make any material or spiritual progress if we disobey our parents. Do not think this at all! **“An astute son is obedient to his father, but a disobedient son is for**

destruction” (Pr. 13:1). If we ignore our father, we become blasphemers; and if we annoy and sadden our mother, we are cursed by the Lord: **“He who forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and he who provokes his mother to wrath is cursed by God” (Sir. 3:16).** If, on the other hand, we honor our father, we will also be honored by our children; and if we receive our father’s blessing, the foundations of our home will be firmly established: **“He who honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays, he will be heard. He who honors his father will have a long life, and he who obeys the Lord will give rest to his mother; and he will serve his parents as his masters. Honor your father and mother in word and deed, that a blessing may come upon you from him. For the blessing of a father establishes the houses of the children, but the curse of a mother uproots their foundations” (Sir. 3:5-9).**

In brief, we are obligated to obey our parents always. The only time we should not listen to them and instead choose the love of God is if they ever order us to do something evil, or to transgress any of God’s commandments, or if they attempt to prevent us from choosing a way of life through which we can better serve and be more pleasing to the Lord, such as the monastic life for example, as the divine Chrysostom affirms. The Lord Jesus Christ indicated this very thing when He was in the Temple and responded in the following way to His parents who were looking for Him: **“Why have you been seeking Me? Do you not know that it is necessary for Me to remain in My Father’s home?” (Lk. 2:49).**