



Brief Patristic Messages



Obedience and Freedom

*† His Eminence, Metropolitan
Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*

THE HOLY FATHERS teach us that genuine human freedom is freedom in Christ.

But how is such freedom achieved?

When man, through submission to Christ, is liberated from his sinful and ailing self; when he places himself under obedience to His sweet yoke.

In the monastic life, this obedience, from the perspective of charismatic freedom, has been examined quite deeply and in a framework far more extensive than the strict notion of obedience to an Elder.

This wider perspective entails great practical advantage for our lay brothers and sisters in Christ, too. A faithful believer ought to attribute all things to God; to believe that all things are appointed by Divine Providence for his salvation; to discern the salvific Will of the Heavenly Father behind all things; to disdain his own will and to accept the Divine Will, no matter what the cost of this to him.

The God-enlightened Holy Fathers advise us to submit to circumstances; this means to place ourselves, with absolute trust, in the hands of our Lord, to remember God unceasingly, and to sail gladly and freely on the open seas of life, confronting all events in obedience to the Will of God.

Daily life offers to the well-intentioned Christian endless opportunities for obedience, the cutting-off of the will, self-denial, and the enjoyment of spiritual peace: at work, at home, on the road, in the shop, and in social relations.

Our heart, by continuous effort in this matter, will become accustomed to living in blessed detachment; it will be liberated from its egocentrism, freed from its imprisonment, will not rest in turmoil, and will not be agitated by even the most urgent of things: it will be filled with sweet love for God and our fellow man.

Only when the wall of his will is brought down, when a man is set free from himself by obedience, is it possible for him to be given over wholly and in self-abnegation to love.

All spiritual illness springs forth from drawing within ourselves, into our selfishness, into our will. We imagine it a fearful thing if our own will is not done; we are seized by grief and unimaginable irritability if the implementation of our own will is thwarted, or if our program or plans are upset....

Hence, sweet is our blessed and salvific freedom in Christ—even though it is achieved through obedience in Christ.

Let us ceaselessly remind ourselves of the following God-inspired counsels of St. Silouan of Athos († September 11, 1938), that they might strengthen us in the contest of facing circumstances in obedience:

“To him who surrenders himself to the Will of God, life goes much more easily, for in ailments and in penury and in trial, he reflects: ‘This was given by God, and it is mine to endure it for my sins.’

How is it possible to know if you are living in accordance with the Will of God?

Behold the sign: If you grieve over some matter, this means that you have not surrendered fully to the Will of God, even if it seems to you that you are living according to the Will of God.

Whoever has surrendered himself to the Will of God is

grieved by nothing, even if he is ill, penurious, or attacked on all sides. His soul knows that the Lord mercifully appoints all things for us. His soul bears witness to the works of God the Holy Spirit, Who knows the soul. However, the arrogant and the insubordinate do not give themselves over to the Will of God, for they love to follow their own wills, a thing most harmful to the soul.

O Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit, make us worthy to live according to Thy Holy Will.”

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