April 19

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Dear Confreres,

I would like to invite you to reflect together about the virtue of obedience. The sadly known "Third Empire", brought the obedience to an unrealistic absurdity. Men's orders were obeyed step by step. Unfortunately that obedience is dead. Because we know, in the first place, that we must obey God rather than men.

"We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5, 29) Thus St. Peter speaks with the other apostles before the Sanhedrin.

Obedience is one of the highest virtues. It is present in the Bible. It stimulates our willingness to submit ourselves to a superior as God's representative. It does not please the modern man, who aspires for independence. It's always easier to deprive oneself of things in poverty, or of corporeal love in chastity, rather than to deprive oneself of one's own will in obedience.

Obedience asks man to be sensitive to the voice of God within himself, because God speaks to man in diverse ways: in the feelings, conflicts, or even in the difficulties of everyday life. It is not enough to hear the voice of God but one must respond to it. One must perceive what God wants in his life, in work, in sickness. This may turn to be an invitation to change one’s style of life, to go ever forward so that body and soul are in harmony.

Perhaps the best-known example of obedience in the Old Testament is that of Abraham. He accepts the proposal of God and responds with his obedience. He takes his only son Isaac and is disposed to do what God commands. And God blesses Abraham for his obedience.

The basis of obedience can be found in the life of Jesus. Everything he does is marked by obedience to the Father. Jesus *humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross*. (Phil 2.8). He says: *My food is to do the will of him who sent me.* (Jn 4, 34) The obedience of Jesus is not a dead obedience, but a consequence of his union with the Father.

St. Vincent in his conferences to the missionaries spoke often of this virtue, which he saw as the pillar not only of the Congregation but also of spiritual life. In the conference of December 19, 1659 he says:

*If the spirit of obedience is not present in the Company, what will it become? Won’t it be a Tower of Babel, in constant disorder? Look at those Commnunities where there’s no obedience; everything is in disorder. I admire the obedience of several in the Company; it’s marvelous both here in this house and elsewhere; several men write to me for the slightest thing they have to do, “What shall I do in this and in that? How shall I act in such or such a circumstance in which passion has a grip on me?” O Savior, forgive us if, up to now, we have committed many faults against obedience! Grant us, Lord, the grace to correct ourselves.*

Dear confreres, may this Easter time encourage us to live more deeply the virtue of obedience and to live in closer union with Jesus on the way to perfection.

Amen.