

Love, Freedom, and Obedience

I have touched upon these themes before in previous postings. But given my recent notes on ownership by youth of their church life, I want to revisit the above three virtues of Christian life to see how they all work together; particularly in this area of ownership of faith and church life.

Let's talk about obedience first. Obedience is simply doing what you are told. Children are called to obey their parents.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

It is easy to think of obedience as doing what you are told because you have no choice and you have to obey. In many cases this is true. A ten-year-old is not permitted to legally drive a car, or vote, or purchase certain substances. Children under 16 may not have the choice to attend or not attend church. Younger kids under seven are told to do something because mom and dad say so. The ongoing "whys" of kids under five can drive parents crazy at times. Kids obey because usually there are consequences if they don't. Those consequences can be natural (learning not to touch a hot stove), or those enforced by parents, (time out, grounding, denial of privileges).

But if you look at the command from St. Paul in Ephesians, there is no "obey, or else" in the above words. Children are called to obey that "it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." This is the "right" thing to do. Obedience is tied to one's well-being and living a long life. So, a parent's motive in forming the virtue of obedience in a child's life is always geared towards their child's well-being, and love for their child is the motivator.

This brings us to the reality that obedience is not something that is forced upon a child; it is a virtue that is taught. It means teaching a child the difference between making right and wrong choices in life. Even in the early years with toilet training, a parent needs to understand the power a child discovers over the choice to control over his own body in relationship to mom or dad. The parent cannot force their child to obey.

The more we back a child into a corner where it

becomes a battle of wills, the more a child will come out fighting. The more a parent can address their child respecting their power to choose, they can then work to shape the virtue of obedience in them. This is done through consistency on a parent's part in enforcing their expectations of their child. "Let your yes be yes, and your no be no." How these expectations are enforced has a lot to do with whether obedience is experienced by a child as leading to learning and growth, or whether it is experienced as "my way or the highway."

The blessing of the Lore be upon you,
The unworthy +Paul

2019 EASTERN CHURCHES SEMINAR "MY SIN & GOD'S MERCY"

When: Sunday, October 20

Time: 3-5pm

Where: Notre Dame College Sdm. Bldg. Great Room (4545 College Drive / South Euclid, OH)

Presenter: Dr. Peter Bouteneff

Dr. Bouteneff teaches courses in ancient and modern theology, spirituality, and the arts, at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary where he is professor of systematic theology.

Book sales and signing after presentation.

Dr. Bouteneff's presentation will be based on the theme of his book, "How to be a Sinner." The book doesn't contain advice on how to sin better. It's a compassionate reflection on what it actually means to identify myself as a sinner, and to do so in a healthy way. The focus is on a healthy self-regard and surrender to the endless love and mercy of God, who saves us precisely through and within our brokenness. "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

Presentation is free and open to the public. For more info, contact : 440-279-9348

ST JOSEPH OF MARBLEHEAD KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS BENEFIT

When: Saturday, October 26th

Time: 5-7:00pm

Where: St Joseph's church hall

Reservations only & must be made by October 21st.

The benefit will be to the Danbury Food Pantry.

Menu:

Clambake: (1 Dozen Clams, ½ Chicken, Corn on the Cob, Sweet Potato, Dessert & Beverage

COST: \$24.95

Chicken Dinner: ½ Chicken, corn on the Cob, Sweet Potato, Dessert & Beverage.

COST: \$11.95

Extra Dozen Clams (With clambake only)

COST: \$12

Call Bryan: 419-341-7145 or **John:** 419-265-1600

Soccer Con't

the rap for something that seems to be happening at that age to a degree anyway.”

“What I found was that by sitting down with the kids themselves, it was a window to establish a bit of a relationship with the kids... to show that the church cared about their world, not just that they were expected to care only about the church. In two cases, with supportive families, we gave them a blessing to be absent Sundays (fortunately neither kid was involved in more than one sport so the season didn't go on forever), and on those weekends, to come to Vespers. It might sound like a low standard but it worked pretty well,

I thought. Kids are invested heavily in these things, sometimes, socially and in other ways, and I sometimes think the church has a lot to gain with those kids by showing it takes their lives and aspirations seriously enough to work around it, and not just treat it as the enemy. So, perhaps too low of a standard, but it has worked well for us, in my opinion.”

At age four this young man loves to go to church. How will he react at age 12?

Priest 4: Give a Little; Make a Few Exceptions, Make the Rule Clear

“When our kids had Sunday morning games my wife and I generally allowed them to participate, since they were occasional. We carefully explained that this was an exception, and that they should never expect that we would permit this weekly and they would attend Saturday vigil on those occasions. Twenty years later, both are active in the church with Orthodox spouses and Orthodox children. Allowing them to participate in a Sunday morning game a dozen or so times when they were kids obviously did not push them out of the Church, and by explaining clearly our feelings about it, they knew exactly where we stood.”

“... In the wash, forcing a kid to go to church, only to have him or her fume throughout the entire Liturgy, walk in and out a dozen times, hang out in the rest room, and brandish his or her displeasure publicly, will do more to insure that they stop going to church when they get older than letting them attend a few — operative here is “a few” — Sunday morning events with the well- reasoned parenting line, “This is NOT the norm, so don't push it with us.”

“...I wouldn't suggest this approach to everyone, especially the lukewarm who complain about Sunday sports but drive their kids to the field instead of the main aisle. A key point is that parents need to be parents. If you want your kids in church bring them to church —regularly.”

Priest 5: Look First at Our Parishes

“People choosing not to attend (for whatever reason —soccer or other) might be an indicator of who we are and what we offer — or fail to offer. Maybe the burden is on us as a parish and on the Orthodox Church to make Sunday Liturgy a blessing for which the people are thankful. The fault may be ours not theirs. Maybe we're too busy paying attention to the past to notice the people of God who are wanting to bless God and be blessed by Him in their lives in 21st century America — rather than in 18th Century rural Russia or Greece.”

So, some common themes —and an array of hopefully helpful perspectives. In the end of course — follow the directives of your parish priest.