



# C.S.S.R. SPIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4, 4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Ef 4, 4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Εφ 4,4)

## ONE BODY – OBEDIENCE

### Our Contemporary Context and its Challenges.

We live in a society and culture today that has many positive values that are prized by our contemporaries and which are essential to living religious obedience according to our Redemptorist way of preaching the Gospel: respect for the human person and for human rights, a willingness to engage in dialogue that is marked by freedom of expression and a respect for what each one expresses, an openness to creative alternatives, the desire to build community, and the longing to live for something and someone greater than oneself.

Of course, there are also negative aspects of our modern culture, as for example a tendency to exaggerated self-sufficiency and individualism, an over-emphasis on “personal fulfilment” and an exaggerated desire for autonomy.

It is true that these aspects of modern culture have made religious obedience more difficult. Yet it is even more true that this modern culture – positive and negative – is a part of our life, our reality, our context. It is in this context that we live our vow of obedience and we have to accept that our obedience will not always be as perfect as we might like it to be.



### Your Word is a Light for my path Philippians 2:3-11

Read carefully these words of Paul in his great Christological Hymn. In these words we see that the life of Jesus was a life of obedience, obedience to the Will of the Father. As professed Redemptorists we are called to empty ourselves to ready ourselves to be available to carry out the Will of the Father in the world we live in today.

### No Religious Obedience without Faith

Our vocation is to be united with Christ the Redeemer in mission. (Cons. 1) We are servants of Christ’s mission. As servants of the mission we are called to “know” the Master. Since the members are called to continue the presence of Christ and his mission of redemption in the world, they choose the person of Christ as the center of their life, and strive day by day to enter ever more intimately into personal union with him. (Cons 23)

To be united with Christ means that we share his relationship with the Father, his way of living, his care for the poor, the sinners, the sick, the marginalized. If we miss the relationship with Christ with the Father, we are only confronted with this wonderful man of Nazareth. Christ's life is not fully appreciated if he is only a man for others. The Gospel makes it clear: Christ is a man for others because he is a man of God. His mission is to proclaim and to live out the unending love of God for all mankind – the Kingdom of God. This is his food, that is his joy, that will be his death. Christ had no fixed program for his life, he took the reality which he encountered, moved by the love of his Father. His fidelity to his mission brought him into conflict with human sinfulness and injustice, and it led him to death – even death on a cross. Even when he became aware of a violent death, he remained faithful to his mission to proclaim God's love. In the life of Christ we see that obedience is a way of living.

That's the obedience we are called to: a way of life. It is clear that we will not be able to genuinely live this "way" if we are not united with Christ. And even when we are united with Christ, our religious obedience will never reach the standard of Christ. But united with him, our religious obedience can become a source of joy. And this joy becomes deeper and stronger since we are called to be companions of Jesus, friends in the Lord. And so our obedience, as a way of living, becomes a sign of the resurrection of Christ – Christ, who continues to live in his Church, in everyone who believes in him.

In relation to the context in which we live today with its emphasis the freedom of the human person and self-realization, we will only be able to live our religious obedience as freedom and self-realization if the mystical experience of passionate love for Jesus, the one who is sent by the Father and who is obedient to the Father's will, remains alive in us and if we daily renew our unconditional commitment to be his companions. It is precisely our living for Jesus Christ that will enable us to bear fruit in our missionary endeavors. (Cons 74 & 75).

### **Religious Obedience – Apostolic Obedience – Availability for Mission.**

Religious obedience, which for us as Redemptorists must be "apostolic obedience," makes no sense when it is not rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ, in God's love for every human being. Some sociological and psychological aspects of obedience can help us live our religious obedience, other aspects are more like challenges we have to take on. But the foundation of our religious obedience lies deeper. Faith in Jesus Christ teaches us that self-realization comes from self-giving and that freedom is not so much the power to choose as the power to order our choices towards love. For us Redemptorists, obedience is grounded in the desire to be sent effectively, to serve completely, and to create ever stronger bonds of union among ourselves. Such apostolic obedience is grounded in mutual trust.



Religious Obedience as Apostolic Obedience can only have meaning if lived in a spirit of the availability as envisaged in Constitution 20 wherein Redemptorists are men who denying themselves are always ready to undertake what is demanding. It is here where we encounter so many problems

today. How often do we hear superiors complain about the lack of availability of many confreres. Most apostolically active confreres are working very hard, mostly in work assigned to them by their superior. But after several years it becomes more difficult to accept another mission or assignment.

Nothing extraordinary here! It would be strange if, after many years in the same place and work, it were not difficult. But this is a difficulty we must live with and accept if we are to avoid the danger of settling “down in surroundings and structures in which their work would no longer be missionary warned of in Constitution 15. Oftentimes today superiors speak of the same confreres always being available when someone is needed and always the same confreres who are not available! Again, Constitution 20 reminds us that availability for mission is one of the hallmarks of a Redemptorist. This call for availability is renewed once again in the Principles of Restructuring. Principle 2 reminds us that Restructuring for Mission should stimulate a re-awakening of our Vita Apostolica. It should prompt a new availability for mission.

Apostolic obedience is one of the foundation stones of Redemptorist religious life. It is apostolic obedience that, as Constitution 75 points out, contributes to the true development of the human person dedicated to Christ.

### **Before the Icon - The Obedience of Mary**

Constitution 32 calls on us Redemptorists to take Mary as our model and helper. Perhaps nowhere is this more challenging than in imitating Mary in his life of obedience. In his *Glories of Mary*, Alphonsus, reflecting on the virtues of Mary, speaks of her obedience (Virtue 8). In his reflection, Alphonsus views the life of Mary through the lens of obedience.

As a model and mother of the Church, Mary embodies in herself the religious’ life of obedience. The angel’s message to her (Lk. 1:32-35) is an anticipation of the proclamation of the Good News after the resurrection (Acts 2). At the annunciation and at the foot of the cross, she showed herself as the perfect model of obedience. She is presented to us as the first to accept Christ and his Gospel by her obedience to God’s plan when she responded to the invitation, ‘Be it done to me according to your Word’ (Lk. 1:38). For this reason, the Fathers of the Church point to the fact that Mary conceived Jesus first in her heart and only then in her womb.

Mary’s obedience to God was manifested not by carrying out what she thought was best before God but by accepting what God asked of her through others – the angel, Simeon, and her own child. As John Paul II pointed out – “She is the model of acceptance of grace by human creatures” (VC, 28b). She obeyed the will of God in spite of the fact that she was in the dark and did not understand God’s real purpose; and in spite of the fact that God called her to obey him, only through the human words of others.



It was the same spirit of obedience to God’s unfathomable plan that Mary showed on Calvary. Jesus on the cross was a sign of rejection which became the sword that pierced her heart (Lk.2:34ff). Here on Calvary, she proved herself as the mother of obedience, when she shared in her Son’s supreme act of obedience. Mary’s obedience, as was Jesus’ own, was not shown through means chosen by her. As a human mother, she too could have said about the cross that it is “not my will.” The cross was a great tragedy imposed on them by others, It was in the face of tragedy that she said with her Son, “your will be done.”



As Alphonsus points out, the early Fathers were fond of closely associating Mary and the Church because of their obedience. Mary is presented to us as the new Eve (John 2:4, 19:26). The Church too is the new Eve. But she became first present in Mary. The damage done by Eve through her disobedience is undone by the new Eve through her obedience. Eve was the mother of the old and disobedient world. Mary is the mother of the new world of obedience to God.

By becoming the mother of Jesus, she thereby became our mother as well. Her motherly word of authority calls us to give our whole-hearted obedience to her Son: “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). Mary shares with us the love which enables us to offer our lives every day for Christ and to cooperate with him in the redemption of our world. Hence, a filial relationship with Mary is the road to fidelity to one’s own vocation and a most effective help for advancing in our vocation and living it fully.

### **Drinking from our own wells.**



In his “*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*” St Alphonsus shows us that love does not insist on its own will so as we end this reflection on obedience let us ask for the grace to be lovingly obedient with one of St Alphonsus’ prayers:

*My God and my all, I feel that, despite all my ingratitude and negligence in serving you, you continue to call me to your love. Here I am, I no longer want to resist. I want to abandon everything so as to be wholly yours. I no longer wish to live for myself. Your claim to my love is too strong. My soul has fallen in love with you, my Jesus; it sighs after you. And how can I love anything else, after seeing you die in pain on a cross in order to save me? How could I look upon you dead and consumed with suffering, and not love you with all my heart? Yes, I love you, my dear Redeemer; I love you with all my soul; and I desire nothing except to love you in this life and for all eternity.*

*I ask you my love, my hope, my fortress and consolation, to give me the strength to be faithful to you. Give me light, and let me know what I should detach myself from.*

*And give me strength, because I want to obey you in everything.*

*Love of my soul, I offer and give myself to you completely, to satisfy your desire to unite yourself to me, that I may be wholly united to you, my God and my all. Come, my Jesus, and take possession of my whole self, and draw to yourself all my thoughts and all my affections.*

*I renounce all my appetites, all my consolations, and all created things: you alone are enough for me. Give me the grace to think of nothing but you, to desire nothing but you, to seek nothing but you, my beloved and my only good!*

*O Mary, Mother of God, beg for me the grace of holy perseverance.*

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ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality. For more information:

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