

Our Calling Is Higher Than Human Respect

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I remember the first thought that crossed my mind after I went to the seminary and begin my religious and priestly formation. It was not the huge sacrifices involved or the changes that I had to make in my life. It was not the demands of a vowed life of chastity, obedience, and poverty too.

I must confess that I first thought about what others would think about my decision for this vocation. Would they approve or reject me, praise or mock me, support or dissuade me? I realized then that I had to face and overcome the formidable challenge of human respect first if I was going to embrace my vocation. This same battle continues today.

As social beings, we feel a sense of accountability to each other. Our best inspirations are usually accompanied by that inner voice, “What would others say or think about this or that?” **But we are lacking in inner freedom if human respect is the first and only thing that moves or stops us from doing the good thing.** A slavish submission to human respect shows an immature freedom on our part.

Jesus came to the Jerusalem temple where He was presented as a baby and where He had attended the Passover feast several times before. He saw that people in the temple were doing everything but worshipping His Father as they should, “He found in the temple those who sold oxen, sheep and doves, as well as the money changers seated there.”(Jn 2:14)

What would He do? To respond to this scandalous behavior in the temple and still be on the safe side, He could call for a synod on appropriate public worship. He also could form a committee of disciples to study the situation and give recommendations for a future pastoral letter. But is that what love for the Father demanded of Him at that very moment?

As God, He knew very well what they would do and say if He cleaned out the temple with a whip. He knew that they would later accuse Him falsely based on His words and actions, “This man said, ‘I can destroy the temple of God and within three days rebuild it.’”(Mt 26:61) He knew that they would use it to taunt and revile Him during His agony on the cross in these words, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days.” (Mk 15:29)

Knowing fully well that His actions would cost Him pain and death, He still chose to do what love for the Father demanded at that very moment and cleanse the temple. In His words, “Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will also do.” (Jn 5:19) He cleansed the temple for His Father’s sake, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.” (Jn 2:16) This action

shows us that **Jesus is perfectly free, and He acts in freedom, always doing the good that love of the Father demands.**

Unless we too are free, and also acting and growing in freedom, human respect will overcome us and quench the good inspirations that we receive from God. We must never underestimate the power of human respect to render divine inspiration useless and dead in us.

How can we grow in this freedom? **We can grow in freedom only by accepting the freedom that God offers to us and then striving to grow in freedom by our free choices.** Freedom is thus both a gift from God and a huge responsibility on our part.

God set His people free from bondage of Egypt first before giving them the Commandments, “I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall have no other gods besides me.” (Ex 20:2-3) Having been set free, the Israelites were to use this freedom to act and grow in freedom by their fidelity to all God’s commandments.

In and through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, God has set us free from the dominion of sin, selfishness, and that self-preservation that hopelessly succumbs to human respect. We participate in His Spirit and are now in Christ, the new indestructible Temple of God, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” (Jn 2:19) **This same Spirit moves us to greater freedom by continuously inspiring us to do the good, true, and beautiful things for God, beginning with keeping God’s commandments.** In Christ, the only one who “understood human nature well,” (Jn 2:25) we can overcome human respect because we are free and graced by His Spirit to act and mature in that freedom.

There are so many painful examples of this slavery to human respect today. The clergy fail to teach and affirm the ageless Christian faith and morals because

they are afraid of being labelled rigid or homophobes. We pretend we do not see the evil that is destroying our loved ones because we do not want to be called judgmental. We remain silent in the face of scandals because we are afraid of being called bigots. We give into the many forms of depraved sexuality of our times because we do not want to be ostracized or called prudes. Many priestly and religious vocations are abandoned or not accepted at all because we are more comfortable to be conformists and not radical disciples of Christ.

Evil triumphs and spreads in our lives, Church, and world today because we are overcome by human respect. We do not seriously think, “What does God see?” because we are preoccupied with asking, “What would people say or think?” Our sins of omission out of human respect only multiply and yield numerous grave sins of commission because we are stifling that inner freedom needed to do the good that love of God and neighbor demands of us.

It is not too late to begin today to battle human respect by cultivating inner freedom through loving obedience to God’s commands. We will always be social beings, bugged with thoughts of human respect. But we are also children of God in Jesus Christ now, united with Him and dwelling in Him as His Temple. Thus, human respect cannot and should not dominate us in our actions and motives. We can still embrace the freedom that Christ merited for us and also obey Him in freedom, doing the good that love demands no matter what others may think or say.

Jesus Christ, whom we encounter in our Eucharist, also warned us gravely about succumbing to human respect, “Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (Lk 9:26) In short, our eternal salvation

depends on how we confront and overcome human respect as we obey God's words and commandments in love.

Christ, who dwells in us, will always inspire us to do great things for His glory and for the salvation of souls. His grace will surely sustain us and He will reward us abundantly now and in the life to come. **If His constant inspiration and grace is not going to be received in vain, then we must begin now to grow in that inner freedom that alone can overcome all human respect.**

Glory to Jesus!!! Honor to Mary!!!



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