

Surrender to the Will of God

The scripture passage of “Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane” is found in all the synoptic gospels: Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:40-46. This narrative reveals a very difficult moment in the life of our Lord. In his human nature, Jesus feels the painful experience of the full force of the human fear of death. He feels the instinctive urge to escape. He gives expression to this urge to escape by asking the Father to take “this cup away.” But he stifles this urge by submitting to the will of the Father. Luke’s gospel tells us that, “In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood” (Lk 22:44). Our Lord practiced the prayer he taught his disciples “Thy Will be Done” (Mt 6:10). Jesus at Gethsemane submits his will in obedience to the will of the Father. The cup is the bitter cup of death. Jesus prays: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine” (Lk 22:42). Jesus prays fervently, but in his prayer he submits to the will of God. His prayer was answered by God. The effect of his prayer was that Jesus was strengthened and could now face his enemies and embrace his passion and death.

My brothers and sisters, in life **every person has his or her Gethsemane**. Like Jesus, we must learn to pray: “Thy will be done.” This is never easy. It was not easy with Jesus, and it will not be easy with us. But like Jesus, we must endeavour to submit to the will of God. The grace to submit to the will of God comes as a result of a close and deep relationship with the Lord and by a consistent life of prayer. Through prayer, we come to discern the will of God. Thus, we have to pray constantly for the grace to accept and submit to the will of God in our lives. Through prayer, we come to accept God’s will in all circumstances: in good times and in bad times. The Bible is filled with examples of those who have surrendered to the will of God. We see this in the life of our Blessed Mother (Lk 1:26-38) and St. Paul on his way to Jerusalem as he addressed the Elders of the Church of Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38). Countless saints have also embraced and surrendered to the will of God. St. Martin of Tours (336-397) is a splendid example of submitting to God’s will. As Martin laid on his deathbed, there was an overwhelming feeling of sadness in the brethren who wept at his imminent death. Martin was so moved by the outpouring of the love of his brethren that he too wept. Deeply touched by the emotions of his brethren, Martin uttered this prayer: “Lord, if I am still needed by your people, I will not refuse the work. Your will be done.” Martin died shortly after uttering this prayer. Evidently, it was the will of God that Martin should come home to eternity.

Obedience in Prayer

Our Lord is a perfect example of obedience to the will of the Father. Obedience means giving up “My Will” for the “Will of Another.” Obedience in prayer comes as a result of love of the other—that is God. Jesus Christ gave up his will for the will of the Father because of his love for the Father. Jesus so loves the Father that he has no food except to do the will of the Father: “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me” (John 4:34). In his human nature, Jesus carries the weight of the sins of all human beings. He sacrifices himself in obedience to the Father so that all humanity can be redeemed. The obedience of Jesus comes in his prayer as he surrendered his own will for the will of the Father. Jesus said “yes” where Adam said “no.” Jesus’ prayer was a loving surrender to God’s will and a disclosure of God’s will. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that

although he was son, Jesus learnt obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8). Jesus learnt through his prayer and obedience the Father's love for him. Even as he was dying, Jesus uttered "yes" to the will of the Father: "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). In our own lives, we must learn to surrender to God's will. We must be obedient in prayer to the will of the Father. We must imitate Christ who became obedient unto death (Phil 2:8). Obedience and surrender to God's will in our lives enable us to be like Christ and to be with Christ by surrendering to God's will in our lives.

The Will of God and Discipleship

Mark 8:34-38 underscores the conditions of discipleship: to accept one's cross and follow in Christ's footsteps. This means submitting to the will of God. Every cross that one bears by way of disappointment, anxiety, sickness, sadness, failure, pain, anguish, misery, betrayal, broken marriage, troubled children, grief, bereavement, and so on, become a moment of spiritual growth, strength in the Lord, and the acceptance of God's will in our lives. As Christians, we are called to carry our cross and follow Jesus. There is hope in accepting the will of God by carrying one's cross. Surrendering to God's will means giving ourselves completely to God. The cross is not an end nor is it a failure; the cross leads to victory and crown. There is always a light at the end of the tunnel.

Surrendering to God's will confronts us with the reality of suffering in the world. How should one cope with suffering? Is every suffering the will of God? Is God's will manifested only in suffering? Does happiness, peace, love, joy, affection, fulfillment, success, wealth, also express God's will? Undoubtedly, suffering is an integral part of the human life. No one is immune from suffering. It is a common denominator of the human person. It is an inescapable reality no matter how one tries to run away from it. One cannot totally run away from suffering but one can cope with it positively in the light of one's faith in such a way that one emerges from it a stronger person both emotionally and spiritually. But the suffering I refer to is **unavoidable suffering**. We must realize that all **avoidable** sufferings such as hunger, violence, war, poverty, inequality, etc., in a sense manifest human evil and gross injustice rather than being necessarily the will of God. Hence, we must work tirelessly to alleviate all avoidable sufferings. The pain, poverty, and suffering of the majority of Nigerians can be avoided. We often have an image of God as loving, trusting, and caring. We cannot compute these images with the reality of our suffering. We often wonder: where is the loving and caring God in my tragedy? Why did God allow this to happen to me? What have I done that God would do this to me? Obviously, we need a conversion of our image of God, a *metanoia* that enables us to transcend our projection of what we want God to be to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who allowed his Son to die on the cross. Christianity does not shield us from unavoidable suffering. Instead, it enables us to receive and accept unavoidable suffering in our lives by uniting them with Christ's suffering and thus grow in faith and grace.

Finally, we must not be afraid to invoke God's will in our prayers. We must cultivate the habit of praying, "Thy will be done," in all our prayers. It is hard to pray "Your will be done" and surrender to God's will in difficult times. But surrendering to God's will always bring us peace even if it involves suffering. Let us always pray: "Here I am Lord, I come to do your will" (Heb 10:9). *May God grant us our hearts' desires on this desert day of prayer. Amen! Praise the Lord!*