

New Year's Day

Obedience to Law

“When eight days were fulfilled for His circumcision, His name was called Jesus” (Luke, 2:21)

Today's brief Gospel tells us that on the eighth day after the birth of Jesus Christ, He received the ceremony of circumcision. This ceremony was conferred on all male infants of the Jewish people according to a law which God Himself promulgated to Abraham many centuries before the coming of Christ. Circumcision incorporated the child among the chosen people of God.

The point which most impresses us is that even the Son of God submitted to this law. He was not bound to obey the law. He was the true Son of God and needed no external sign to be numbered among those dear to His Father. His soul was never defiled with original sin. Yet, with the co-operation of His mother and His foster father He obeyed the laws of God willingly. The reason is that He wished to teach us the necessity of obeying the laws by which we are bound.

All true law has its origin in God Himself. Some of His laws God promulgates through man's own reason, such as the prohibition to steal or to murder, and the obligation to love one's parents. These constitute the natural law. Other laws God has explicitly imposed on man, such as the obligation of circumcision in the Old Testament and the duty of receiving Baptism in the Christian dispensation. These constitute the divine-positive law.

Furthermore, there are two societies on earth empowered by God's authority to make laws for their members--the Church and the State. To their laws also we must be obedient, since these laws are really the expression of God's will. Thus, we must go to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days because the Church commands it; we must pay our taxes, and observe the laws of safe and decent driving because the State commands it. Intelligent Catholics know full well that there is no conflict between their duties as Catholics and their duties as citizens. On the contrary obedience to each of these two divinely-established societies helps us to be obedient to the laws of the other.

Practical Application

On this first day of the New Year, we could not make a better resolution than the intention of imitating the Son of God in His obedience to law. We should be obedient not only to the laws directly imposed by God but also to those promulgated in His name by Church or State. If we fulfil this resolution this will surely be for us a happy year.