

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

And He said to them, "Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that He spoke to them.

And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And His mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. ^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

"I must be in My Father's house?"

These are some of the first words that we hear our Savior speak, so they must be important, but if we don't dwell on these words, we can easily be like Mary and Joseph –

not understanding the saying that He spoke to them.

So we won't pass over them too quickly today. Instead we will **treasure them in our hearts**, so that like our young Savior, we may **increase in wisdom... and in favor with God and man.**

When we hear that word "**must**" we understand that there is a sense of obligation, of duty.

And there are different roots of that sense of duty, aren't there?

It can come from within you... as when you say to yourself, "I must wash my hands frequently."

There, you are the only one putting pressure on you to perform that task.

The obligation can come from outside of you... as when the governor says, "You must wear a mask."

Whether you want to wear one or not, it is mandated.

And sometimes there is a combination of the two... as when your parents say,

"You must open your Christmas presents."

Here - the will of the parents and the child are united and both are pleased.

But that word "must" can be a very heavy and burdensome word for us.

When it comes from outside of you, it doesn't give you a choice.

It means that you're not in control, that you're not independent.

It means that you are under someone else's will, and someone else is telling you what to do, often with a threat of some kind for non-compliance.

And boy... that doesn't sit well with our natural man, our sinful nature.

In fact, if someone tells us what to do, of a sudden a desire to do the opposite sets in.

"You must not open that envelope."

"You mean this one particular envelope that I wasn't even considering opening before you told me that I must not open it?

I wonder what's inside of it now. Why don't you want me to open it?"

...

When we hear of 12-year old Jesus saying, "**I must be in My Father's house,**"

we can easily put that kind of meaning to His words.

He is obligated to be there. It is a command from His heavenly Father.

He has to be there; otherwise He would be sinning and then ought to be punished.

Perhaps we think this because we are projecting it upon Him...

that is, we are thinking that He thought and desired exactly as we do.

And so you hear the 3rd commandment, "*You shall keep the day of rest holy,*"

and what you hear is "You must be in God's house... or else."

And just like someone telling you not to open the envelope, you desire to open it...

so someone telling you that you must go to church, that you must meditate on God's Word,

that you must pray, that you must join with fellow Christians who are the body of Christ,

that you must receive the Lord's Supper, and so on...

you want to show them that you will not be ruled by such a command,

that you can make your own decisions about what you must... or must not do.

Unfortunately, this temptation is prevalent in the Christian Church.

Our sinful nature is strong, or when it is not strong, it is persuasive, or simply undisciplined.

And how devastating it is on the Church, not only when we give into our defiant/lazy sinful nature,

but when we drag the children into it and model it for them.

When we are not diligent to see to it that they are brought to their heavenly Father's house.

When they, who have not choice, are made to neglect His Word by the "free" choices of their parents.

When they are not allowed to receive Jesus' absolution regularly and often, though they need it too.

When they are taught, by example, to despise the preaching of His Word by their non-attendance,

or taught by the rest of us when we are flippant with our attendance.

When they do not learn and are not able to join in the prayers and songs of the Church

because they are simply not present to do so.

When turning with sour face, we discourage them or their parents with them from attending,

or when we do not encourage them or their parents to persevere and come again next week.

...

But we must not project our sinful will and nature upon Jesus... or misunderstand His word "must."

For Jesus, to be in His Father's house was certainly His Father's will.

It was a "must" from outside of Him to attend the Passover, but it was obviously more than that,

because He had already fulfilled the requirements of the Law for that Passover.

He, Mary, and Joseph had been there for the Passover.

St. Luke tells us that "**the feast was ended.**" There was nothing more required of Him.

But Jesus wasn't finished. He stayed behind because this "**must**" came from within.

This sense of obligation is what we hear continually in the Psalms, such as in Ps. 27^[4, 8]

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,

to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple....

You have said, "Seek My face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek."

This "**must**" was not simply one of obligation, it was one of privilege.

He had the privilege to be in His Father's presence: to hear His holy Word from the priests,

and to meditate on His Word day and night, asking and answering questions of the teachers

...in other words, being catechized by His heavenly Father through His Church on earth. He recognized the privilege to see in the slaughtered Passover lambs that sacred work that He would have 21 years later as the Lamb of God to take away the rebellion of the world.

This “**must**” was the internal drive that He expressed at His baptism when **John would have prevented Him**^{Matthew 3:14}, but Jesus responded,

“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to, thus we must, fulfill all righteousness.”

Jesus’ obedience to His Father’s will, even as a 12 year old boy, was fulfilling what we’re not able to do.

He was earning for you, children and adults, perfect attention and devotion to God’s Word.

Far from fighting the Father’s will and despising the preaching and hearing of His Word,

Jesus cherished His Father’s Word and *gladly heard and learned it*.

And by so doing, He made it possible for you to cherish it also,

not as a rule book of what you must or must not do,

but as the Gospel, the Good News of what Jesus has already done and accomplished for you.

...

For the times when God commands a “must” or “must not” and you want to fight it...

For the times when God commands a “must” and you acquiesce, but begrudgingly...

For the times when God commands a “must” and you willingly try to comply, but do so imperfectly...

This was why Jesus “must”, why He had to be, in His Father’s house: to fulfill your righteousness.

This is also why Jesus told Nicodemus, “**as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,**

so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.”^{John 3:14,15}

Jesus willingly gave Himself up to the cross, so that His blood could cover all your unwillingness and inability to fulfill His Father’s righteous demands.

And the miracle of that Gospel is that it releases you of the burden of God’s divine “must.”

As your sinful nature was crucified with Jesus through Baptism,

so the *new man daily comes forth and arises*^(Small Cat.: Baptism) to **walk in newness of life.**^{Romans 6:4}

St. John encourages us, **For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.**

And His commandments are not burdensome.^{1John 5:3}

To your new man, God’s commands are not a burden, but a privilege.

His commands are no longer simply a “must” from outside of you,

but He gives to you the will and desire to do His good pleasure, conforming your will to His.

A great example of this is in the “Admonition to Parents and Sponsors” in the Rite of Holy Baptism, where the obligation is put upon the parents

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to assist their child with Christian love and faithful prayers...

to remind him of the heavenly grace of his Baptism...

to teach her the 10 Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer...

to place the Holy Scripture in his hands,

and insure that she is brought to the services of God’s house,

and provided instruction in the Christian faith

so that they may come to the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood.

That is a lot of obligation, a lot of work, a lot of “musts,” if you will.

But it is one that parents and sponsors willingly take on, desiring the salvation of their child

just as their heavenly Father does.

And while there are always difficulties and obstacles and distractions,
from our sinful nature, from parents, from children, from others, and from the world,
that make this good and godly task difficult at times... perhaps even most of the time,
know this: you are never alone in your struggles.
The Lord is with you through your Baptismal grace.

And of course, when you are in His Father's house, there Jesus **must** be... for you and with you,
and He must be there to be about His Father's business:
to speak His Father's Words of forgiveness and comfort to the **weary and heavy-laden**,
daily and weekly raising up the new man in you through His Word,
& strengthening you to resist the rebellion within you.
By His grace, you too can say with Jesus and according to His Father's will,
"I must be in my Father's house. Our children must be in their Father's house,
to seek His face,
to open up His Christmas present to us,
to hear His Word and
to receive His forgiveness in Christ.

Take heart also in the comfort that Jesus is still in His Father's house for you,
not just in this house, but in His heavenly home, interceding before His Father's throne on your behalf.
There His Father and yours sees Jesus' perfect obedience and the scars of Jesus' passion and death,
and listens to His prayers for you.
And if it wasn't enough for your Savior to pray for you, He calls upon His Church to do the same
as we do at the end of the Rite of Baptism,
"God enable you to do this faithful and loving work.
By His grace may He fulfill what we are unable to do."

Thanks be to God!

Soli Deo Gloria