

“Do Whatever He Tells You”

Tenth Annual Novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Fruit of Her Pondering: the Words of Our Lady

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“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’” (Jn 2: 1-5)

As with the previous words of Our Lady in Scripture, there are many avenues that one can take with this event in Cana. We could reflect on Mary’s motherly attention to all our needs and the efficacy of her intercessory prayers for us with her Son. We could examine the use of the word “woman” and how this one word ties her to the first woman, Eve, the promise of the savior in Gen 3:15 and the woman clothed with the sun in the book of Revelation. We could look at the Eucharistic themes present within the text, since yesterday was the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. However, our point of prayerful reflection this evening will be simple, as are the last recorded words of Mary in the Scriptures – “Do whatever He tells you.”

A person’s last words have always been treated with great importance. At an untimely death, how many have either cherished the last words they spoke to the person, or regretted their last words, possibly spoken in haste, thoughtlessness or anger? In books and films we’ve seen characters lean in closely to catch the last words of the dying person. Who could forget the novel Citizen Kane where everyone is trying to unravel the man’s mysterious last word “Rosebud”? The last words of Our Lady should capture our attention as well.

“Do whatever he tells you”. There could have been no better words, no more profitable advice. These words of Our Lady can be seen as a permanent invitation to each of us. St. Thomas Aquinas states that “in [these words of Our Lady] all Christian

holiness consists: for perfect holiness is obeying Christ in all things” (St. Thomas Aquinas, Comm. On St. John)

“Do whatever he tells you.” Really, it’s very simple. Do you want to be holy? Then “Do whatever he tells you.” But simple does not mean easy. Is it easy to “Do whatever he tells you”? If it was, we’d all be saints. The world would be much different. Why are these simple last words so difficult for us? Why can’t we just “Do whatever he tells you.”?

The first question to answer would be -- **why** do I want to do what he tells me? Let’s look to the natural to give us a glimpse of the supernatural. Why do we tell small children to do what their parents tell them? We recognize that the parents are smarter and have more experience than the children. They should know what the child should do. Tied with that knowledge, however, is the important factor of love. The parent tells the child what to do because the parent loves the child and wants, not just their good, but the child’s best good. If this is true of human parents, then even more so is it true of God our Father. St. Catherine of Siena puts these consoling words on Our Lord’s lips: “My Will only wants your good, and all that I give or allow, I allow or give so that you may achieve your end, for which I created you.” (St. Catherine of Siena, Dialogue, 2,6). We want to do God’s will not only because He is God, but also because He loves us. He desires our best good, which is for us to be with Him in heaven. He desires it more than we desire it. He is constantly working to bring us to this union with Him, which is why we were created. He knows each of us intimately. He is smarter than we are! He knows the paths that we should take, what we can handle, and is striving to lead us to Himself. We need to constantly reflect on this immense love of God and build within our hearts a desire to do His Will in my life, knowing that He only works for our good.

Ultimately, to quote Dante’s Paradisio, “In His Will is my peace”. If you read many saints’ lives, you’ll find them in all sorts of turbulent circumstances. They could have people tracking them down to kill them, or on the seas about ready to drown, or dirt poor and the merchants are knocking at their door looking for payment, or their whole life’s work is about to crumble to the ground, yet they are at peace. Why? They knew of the Father’s loving care for them, they knew they were following His will – so the outcome was in His providential hands as well. They were at peace. The same can be

said of us. Even though it seems that what God is asking of me is far from peaceful, if I embrace His Will, with complete faith and confidence in His love and care for me, with confidence that His Will will always be done, then I too will be at peace. Our lack of peace can come from a lack of trust – I don't truly believe that God loves me, that He desires my good. I can forget that God is omnipotent – I think that what's going on in my life is beyond His power. He can create the universe, but this particular situation is beyond His power. Isn't that ridiculous? Our lack of peace can be our own will shouting, "Not thy will, but mine be done!" Think back to that little child with the loving parents. What's one of the first words the little child learns? "No". That little stubborn will pits itself against the loving will of his parents. Isn't that the way we are with God sometimes? We "spiritually" stamp our foot, stick out our lower lip and say "No". It's not what we've been asked to do that causes our lack of peace, but our resistance, our "no" to the request.

Our loving Mother Mary calls us to "Do whatever He tells you." She knows the loving Will of the Father, His desire to be united with us forever in heaven, and calls us to trust in His omnipotence, His love and care for us. St. Teresa of Avila counsels us: "The highest perfection consists not in interior favors or in great raptures, but in the bringing of our wills so closely into conformity with the Will of God that, as soon as we realize that he wills anything, we desire it with all our might." (St. Teresa of Avila, Foundations, 5,10)

Do we have a desire to do what God wants of us, in big things as in small; in what we like and in what we dislike? We can ask our Mother Mary to teach us to love this holy Will in everything that happens, even in what we find hard to understand. She cultivated this desire to know God's will in her life in all things, big and small. It's this constant desire to do God's will that helped her embrace all that God asked of her. By reading the scriptures we can see how, time after time, she followed her own advice – she would "Do whatever he tells you." Was it always easy? No. But she desired to love God – and she showed this love by desiring and embracing all that God asked of her. She will help us form that attitude so that we can "Do whatever He tells you."

So, I'm working on that attitude, but, my second question is -- how do I know what God wants me to do? You're probably thinking about the Annunciation, or St.

Joseph's dreams, or some of the saints who saw visions or heard the voice of God telling them go here or do that. Well, that's pretty rare. God primarily communicates His will to us in very ordinary ways – not as spectacular, but just as reliable.

First, God makes his Will known to us through the Commandments, which are the expressions of all our obligations and a practical norm so that our conduct may be directed towards God. The more faithfully we keep them, the more we will love what He wants. God also shows himself to us through the Church – through her teaching and directives, as well as through the advice we receive in confession and spiritual direction.

God's will is also made manifest in the obligations of our state of life. We will never love God, we will never grow in holiness, if we do not faithfully fulfill these obligations: parent/child, brother/sister, aunt/uncle, employee/employer, student, etc. These obligations that fill each day enable us to see clearly at each moment what God wants of us personally. The duties and responsibilities of a young wife and mother are very different than that of a religious sister. Both are called to holiness, yet the paths are different. Finding, loving and embracing God's Will in those duties that are connected to our state in life will give us the strength we need to carry them out with perfection.

God's will is also shown to us through those events that He permits, and which are always directed towards a greater good. There is a hidden providence behind each happening. Everything – even the things we don't understand, the very turn of events our will starts off by resisting – is ordered and directed towards the good of all. In this life we will never fully understand the mysterious and baffling events that God allows to happen. Yesterday we reflected on the loss of the child Jesus for three days in the Temple. Did Mary fully understand what was going on? Yet she lovingly embraced it as God's will, trusting in his providential care, pondering it in her heart. We are not called to understand, but merely to "Do whatever he tells you." It is helpful, on occasion, to look back on the path of our lives—over the last year or five or ten. See how the Lord has guided you in and out of various events in your life. You will begin to recognize the loving hand of your Father. It is good to recall this when you find yourself in another struggle. The same loving Father who guided you before is still guiding you now.

Desiring God's will, knowing God's will, and then doing God's will. This third part can also be a stumbling block. Prayer and reflection are good and necessary – but at some point action needs to be taken – actually doing what God asks of us.

Let's go back to Cana. The servants have just been told by Mary to "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, 'Fill the jars with water.' So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.' So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him." (Jn 2:7-11)

Let's look at those servants. The servants knew what they were asked to do. They could have asked our Lord for clarification or various alternatives to his directive, met in committee and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of Jesus' directive before they decided if they should move ahead with the proposed plan, created a "back-up" plan in case the first set of directions didn't work out, asked for Jesus' credentials, decided that they had a better plan and carried it out, or simply just snuck away and hoped that Jesus and Mary would ask someone else to do the job. But, no, they followed Our Lady's advice to "Do whatever he tells you."

"Picture what happened. Pretend you're one of the servants. You fill up six huge stone jars with water (no easy task when you have to back and forth to the well). Then this young rabbi from the neighboring town tells you to draw some out (some of the water, remember – you know it's water, because you put it in there yourself) and bring it to the steward in charge of testing the wine before serving it. Image how dumbfounded you would be by such an order. But you do it. And you're carrying the water over to the steward, glancing nervously back over your shoulder at Mary and Jesus, who motion for you to keep going. You hand the gourd to the boss, looking down, maybe even closing your eyes in anticipation of his wrathful rebuke. And then, all of a sudden, he smacks his lips and hums with pleasure...Jesus turned a hundred gallons of water into excellent

wine, effortlessly. This is our Lord.” (The Better Part, John Bartunek, LC, Circle Press, 2007, pg 810.)

This wonderful miracle relied on the fact that they had to “Do whatever He tells you.” And what was the result? Not only lots of excellent wine, but the scriptures tell us that “Jesus ... revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him” (Jn 2:11). We have one great big advantage over these servants. We know the whole story. We know who this rabbi is – He is the Son of God. We know who it is who asks us to “Fill the jars”. We may not understand it, we may be a little nervous, we may think the Lord has “got the wrong person” for this task, but all we have to do is simply trust and do what we believe the Lord asks of us. The servants not only filled the jars, but, as scriptures tells us, they filled them to the “brim”. No half-filled jars, but to the brim. If we do all that we can, then we can be sure that the Lord will do the rest, according to His Will. St. Therese said, “Serve God. He will take care of the results.” (Sermon in a Sentence, John McClernon, ed. Ignatius Press, 2002, pg. 44)

It’s simple. Follow our Lady’s last words in the Scriptures: “Do whatever He tells you.” Then you will see that Our Lord will turn our efforts and our work, which would otherwise remain supernaturally sterile, into the most exquisite of wines.