**Chapter 5: Obedience**

January 23, May 24, September 23

*This very obedience, however, will be acceptable to God and agreeable to men only if compliance with what is commanded is not cringing or sluggish or half-hearted, but free from any grumbling or any reaction of unwillingness. For the obedience shown to superiors is given to God, as he himself said: “Whoever listens to you, listens to me” (Luke 10:16). Furthermore, the disciple’s obedience must be given gladly, for “God loves a cheerful giver” (2Cor. 9:7). If a disciple obeys grudgingly and grumbles, not only aloud but also in his heart, then, even though he carries out the order, his action will not be accepted with favour by God, who sees that he is grumbling in his heart. He will have no reward for service of this kind; on the contrary, he will incur punishment for grumbling, unless he changes for the better and makes amends.*

Here Benedict presents us with the vision of a full, willing, and open yes. This vision, this ideal, is not something to beat ourselves up with. Compassion and gentleness underpin the whole rule. There is a mystery here to move towards with growing faith, growing acceptance, growing love. Benedict is teaching us that non-resistance means that we are simply being ourselves. He is showing us that a trait of human maturity is the open expression of our deeper ourselves, regardless of circumstance.

With practiced obedience, any distinctions between being and doing fade. Rather than grumbling and resisting, that is, having our doing driven to some extent by the ego, in the contemplative (meditating) community this resistance fades. Then we might discover ourselves, simply and consciously, expressing our being in what we do. The goal of obedience in a loving community is to simply and freely be ourselves in all action.

On this journey into wholeness, or non-duality, we practice free and open acceptance straight away before we become aware of any inner grumbling and division. This does not mean that we suppress our awareness of grumbling and dividedness. We do both: we act as if we are whole-hearted and we grow in the awareness of what gets in the way of whole-heartedness. Whole-heartedness is non-duality. Non-duality is the expression of being.

In community we explore the nuances around suggestion and requirement, around what we need and what we want. We discover our motivations for living, our inner reasons and excuses for doing and not doing.

Not growing in this whole-heartedness has its own penalty. A half-hearted commitment ensures that we live half a life. Perhaps a perennial question in any commitment is what stops whole-heartedness.

Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil; stick to what is good. Be affectionate to another with fraternal love, outdoing one another in showing honour, not holding back in enthusiasm, being ardent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, steadfast under trial, persevering in prayer, sharing the needs of the saints, cultivating hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13, RNJB).