

The First Sunday after Epiphany  
January 11, 2009


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✧ Jesu juva ✧

## THE AUTHORITY UNDER AUTHORITY

Luke 2:41-52

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

oday we have heard the only story of Jesus' childhood, with the exception of the infancy narratives of the Gospels, that is recorded in the Scriptures. It is recorded, because it reveals so much about Christ Jesus and about His purposes and works for us. Today we find Jesus not where his mother and guardian expected Him to be, but in the Temple. They had travelled for a whole day following their Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and thought that He was with their relatives and friends. But when the day's travel is ended, He is not there. So they go back to Jerusalem, and search for Him for three days, finding Him at last in the Temple.

Mary says to Him: "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." Mary had not known where He was, but His Father knew. For He was in His Father's house. There He was sitting among the teachers of the faith, and like a catechist He was asking them questions and listening to them. They supposed Him a pupil of sorts in their midst, but He proves Himself to be the master Teacher, the true Rabbi of Israel. And Luke reports: "And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed." Yes His Father knew where He was and what He was doing; for He was about His Father's business.

Now when Jesus answers His mother in this way, saying: "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" what is His intent? He is by no means showing disrespect to Mary, His mother. Rather, as the Son of God, He is asserting his Divine purpose and work. He has always been the Word of God, and now incarnate as such He must be about the work of proclaiming and teaching the Word God has delivered. And Mary is reminded by this that though Joseph, the a faithful and beloved guardian, is not to be confused with Jesus' true Father. Moreover the Holy Child is more than Mary's son, He is also her Lord and God. And He must fulfill His purpose in coming down from heaven. He must proclaim and fulfill the Word of His Father.

But after this Luke reports: "Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." And here Jesus shows us that He indeed does respect and honor His mother and Joseph, His guardian. Though Son of God He is also son of Mary, and therefore is subject in all things pertaining to His humanity to her authority as parent. And so we have in this scene a clear depiction of Christ in His Divinity and in His humanity; on the one hand subject to no one but the Heavenly Father, on the other subject to human authorities and willingly submissive to them.

And in this we see a depiction of how we are to respect and honor those in authority over us, and also an example of when we are to ignore earthly authorities for the sake of faithfulness to the Divine authority of our Heavenly Father. Jesus, though Himself God in the flesh, submits to the authority of His mother. Why? He is clearly higher than she in the scheme of things. He is, after all,

of higher status and authority of the angels and archangels, higher than the patriarchs and saints. Certainly He is of higher status than she who is called Blessed only for sake of having borne Him. And yet He submits to her, in fulfillment of the fourth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother". He honors her because in doing so He is not only honoring Mary, but is also honoring His Divine Father whose authority stands behind the lesser authorities of parents and earthly masters. Jesus shows us by His example of submission that we also are to submit, even to authorities that we deem below us in honor or status in some way. Again, as God Jesus is clearly over her, but as her son, He submits. And so should we submit to all authorities God has placed over us, as St. Peter writes: "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors... Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh... Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands..." (I Peter 2:13, 18; 3:1). And all of this flows out the commandment to honor our parents, and behind it the greater commandment to honor God.

And when are we bound not to submit to them, only when they require of us something that is clearly contrary to God's Word. Earthly authorities have no authority when they command you to do something wrong, something that God has forbidden. When they do this they have transgressed the authority given them, because their authority comes from God. And you, if and when you are in authority, must remember this. Parents must remember that God has given them charge over their children in order to bring them up in righteousness and train them in the way they should live. Employers and supervisors must recall that they have been given their authority by God for the good of their workers and not only for the profit of their businesses. Governors and legislators must recall that they have been put into office for the sake of upholding righteousness and order, not for the sake of personal benefit and graft. Yes those in authority must also honor the One who has given that authority to them, whose authority they are to exercise for the good of their neighbors.

But there is also a temptation to live in a way that does not follow Christ's example in this Gospel lesson. The sinful inclination of man is to shun all authority, to be an authority unto one's self. It is both rampant in our day and age, and accepted almost as a right. What is good and right for one person is not necessarily good and right for another. Each must decide for him or herself what is right and pursue it. Each must be autonomous in his or her life and choice of lifestyle. No one ought to be bound by Divine Law, nor as much as possible by human laws and opinions. Rebellion is one of the chief virtues of the post-modern world view. And that is an ancient world-view, one stretching all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve exercised their own sense of autonomy toward God and found themselves cast out.

And this shunning of authority takes different forms. We see it in children who question the authority of mother and father and exercise their own will in disobedience and lack of respect. We see it in students who despise their teachers. We see it in wives who refuse to listen to and honor their husbands. We see it in citizens who attempt to skirt the authority of their government. We see it in small ways when citizens refuse to pay their taxes or in larger ways when they riot against perceived or even real injustices. We see it in churches when parishioners refuse to hear and honor their pastors. And all of this rebellion is not so much a rebellion against one authority or another, as much as it is a rebellion against God Himself. Every transgression of the fourth commandment is also a transgression of the first.

And even if one thinks one's self above such authorities, superior to them either in personality or in character, or in ability or knowledge, it is no cause for rebellion, but rather for repentance. If Christ who is the Divine Son of God submits to his mother as an authority over him according to his humanity, then we who are but mortal men and women should also submit to the authorities God has placed over us. As St. Paul says today: "I say... [to everyone] not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly..." And even if you are right, that you are wiser, have a greater ability, a more noble character, you are called still to submit for the sake of God. And this St. Paul rightly calls a sacrifice: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

When I would ask my son to recite the fourth commandment, he used to say "that's the hard one, isn't it." It is a hard commandment for us to keep, as are all of God's commands. But the keeping of this one is especially hard as it requires us to make a sacrifice of our own will and submit to the will of another. And that is hard for the old sinner in us to do, the old sinner who always wants things his or her way, the old sinner who continues in the rebellion of Adam and Eve against the authority of God.

But that is why Christ has come down to take on flesh. He has come to answer for Adam and Eve's rebellion, answering with His own obedience and faithfulness. He has come to take on flesh that in doing so he may take on Himself the sins of our flesh. He has come, who has all authority, to be put under authority for us. He has come to pay for our disobedience, all of it, through the sacrifice not only of His own will, but of His life. I find it interesting that when Jesus' parents search for Him in Jerusalem they do not find Him until the third day. And it was Passover time. And at a Passover some 21 years later the Son of God is found again in Jerusalem about His Father's business. He dies and is buried. And He is found again on the third day, having concluded that business with honor and glory.

And now He brings that work to us, to forgive our sins and to raise us up to new life. He forgives not only our transgressions against the fourth commandment, but also those against all of the commandments, even the sins against the first commandment. Through His Word and grace He also strengthens us in the faith that we might more faithfully live the sacrificial life of service and faithfulness whether in authority or under it, that we have been called to live. And He will at the last come again to free us from all earthly bonds. And then we will live under but one authority, the direct authority of God Himself, in His blessed presence. Yes He was obedient and faithful to us, in order to do all of this, to Him be honor and glory now and forever. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠