

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year B  
July 31-August 1, 2021

*I have heard the grumbling.*

Readings: Exodus 16: 2-4, 12-15; Ephesians 4: 17, 20-24; John 6: 24-35

Have you ever profited from a piece of good advice, even when directed to another? For example, listen to a section from the Rule of St. Benedict on Obedience: “For if the disciple obeys with an ill will and murmurs, not necessarily with his lips but simply in his heart, then even though he fulfill the command, yet his work will not be acceptable to God, who sees that his heart is murmuring.”<sup>1</sup>

At the time in which the murmuring took place in Exodus, the Israelites were just one month into their journey and running out of food. In Verse 8, left out of today’s passage: “*Your grumbings are not against us but against the Lord.*” Moses clearly warned the people that their grumbings were not so much against Moses and Aaron as against the Lord Himself.

Today it will be profitable for us to take a moment to reflect upon our own penchant for grumbling and complaining, as well as possible remedies. Often, a spirit of complaining is usually a symptom of something deeper. I know that it is this way for me. If I am worried about some aspect of my ministry here, the stress produces bad fruit. I may complain about finances, the constant upkeep of the physical plant, the heat inside Church, or a host of other items. Take your pick.

While complaining provides temporary relief, it never produces lasting peace. It is one thing to vent one’s feelings to a friend, but entirely another to be overcome by a spirit of grumbling. Why would Benedict have devoted space in his Rule to this problem, if it were not real? He saw how it tore at the fabric of his community and witnessed its destructive power. The framework of monastic life is obedience. External conformity is but one aspect; what is needed is internal consent. We can obey our superiors (teachers, parents, bosses, etc.), but inside we may be seething.

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<sup>1</sup> Rule of Benedict, Chapter 5: On Obedience

The motive of inner assent must be that of love. In monastic life, love and obedience are so intimately linked, that each becomes an expression of the other. Is it significantly different for those of us not called to monastic life? I submit to you that the answer is “No.” Nothing is so corrosive to a family, parish or workplace than constant complaining.

The complaint itself is not really the problem. Any effective organization has a mechanism for fielding legitimate complaints. People in customer service routinely deal with this, treating people with care and concern. Parents regularly field complaints, but children can make their parents’ lives much easier by looking into their own hearts.

Ask yourself this question: “How is my complaint helping this situation?” Could you rephrase it as a suggestion which would be more effective and kinder? Sometimes a change in our tone can bring about the same effect without the hard feelings. Let’s aim for a complaint free day on Monday!

St. Benedict keenly understood that complaints were not the problem; rather, complainers were. Murmuring can quickly become part of the ‘underlife’ of a religious community. So too in our lives. It affects the entire family; it infects the entire workplace or parish. That was the ground for St. Benedict’s severe treatment of it in chapter 34 of his Rule, in which he writes that complainers were subject to severe correction.

God can see the resistance in the heart of a murmurer. The Israelites could not see the value of their sacrifices, preferring the *status quo*, even though that was hardly a life of peace. Their freedom came with suffering, but they could not see beyond the present moment, that the future held much more hope than the present. So, they complained.

Let us together seek a better way in our own hearts, in our families, and in this parish. Let us repent of this harsh spirit of complaining and be grateful for God’s blessings and commit ourselves to truly building up the Body of Christ in Christian charity and in truth.