

The Work of Resurrection

-November 2021-

"Hurry then, take up this work of resurrection, never forgetting that the special end of your institute is, before all, to sanctify youth."

-Basil Moreau, Christian Education, 1856

Holy Cross high schools around the country used to teem with Brothers decked out in black habits, white collars, long cords and arms filled with books, musical instruments, lesson plans, sports equipment or any number of other things. Thirty or forty of these men lived in residences attached to the schools which functioned as fine-tuned machines capable of accommodating hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of students. The precision with which the schoolhouse operated was possible because of *the religious vow of obedience*. Indeed, a military-like chain of command allowed for decisions to be made and orders to be carried out in a very efficient way which led to the full-flourishing of the institution.

Religious life and schools are not that way anymore, but *the virtue of obedience* remains the lever that makes our hallways, classrooms, gymnasiums and cafeterias healthy spaces where real formation is possible. Obedience, a word which literally means "deep listening," is at the heart of the spiritual life: there is the quintessential Jewish prayer, "Listen, O Israel, the Lord is one..." (Deut 6:4), the first line of the Rule of Benedict, "Listen, my child, with the ear of your heart" (Prologue, 1), as well as the voice from heaven at the Transfiguration of the Lord, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!" (Mk 9:7). The journey to deep listening, which can be very slow going for us whose first parents were icons of disobedience (cf. Gn 3:6), is worked out in time through real human interactions, but oh how difficult it can be to really listen to one another!

Deep listening means that we have interior space to ponder, without judgment, what another person has said or has done. What does it mean? The student who seeks attention in the classroom, if we listen closely enough, is probably saying, "I don't feel loved." The colleague who snaps at us when we ask for a favor is probably saying, "I don't feel respected." The angry email from the parent is probably an indication that there is some past trauma with a teacher. The coach who puts pressure on us to boost the star player's grade is probably communicating that she or he is afraid of being fired at the end of the season if the team does not start winning! Taking the time to confront the reality at hand, patiently awaiting what it really means, and responding with love and compassion does wonders for a building that is otherwise a bowl of emotions. We, indeed, all have ample opportunity to practice deep listening in the schoolhouse.

Even though the Brothers of Holy Cross are largely not staffing our high schools anymore, some of the militaristic language and culture of religious life from the 1950s and 1960s may still persist. I can remember my first year as a Holy Cross Educator when I had many superiors: the president, the principal, the associate principal, the campus minister and the department chairperson, not to mention all of the daily orders that I received from parents, students, colleagues and even alumni! The stress was unbelievable, and it was very easy for me to be reactionary without taking the time to listen deeply to the meaning of those interactions. The discipline of obedience, however, was a grace with which God blessed my ministry and allowed me to eventually be an instrument for good in an otherwise complicated web of people. Let us join with the Brothers whose own personal journeys of spiritual maturity involved learning how to live out the vow of obedience beyond the chain of command and see it as an occasion to "discover and accept the Lord's will more surely" (*Constitutions*, 50) in all that they would come to say, think and do.