**Trust and Obey = Faith**

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When I was a child I was taught the Sunday School song, “Trust and Obey for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to Trust and Obey.”

So some time ago this song comes back to me when I read the gospel of the healing of the centurion’s servant.

A new understanding of this story and of faith hit me square between the eyes. Here’s a clip from the gospel:

“Lord, do not trouble yourself,

for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof.

Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy to come to you;

but say the word and let my servant be healed.

For I too am a person subject to authority,

with soldiers subject to me.

And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes;

and to another, ‘Come here,’ and he comes;

and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him

and, turning, said to the crowd following him,

“I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

When the messengers returned to the house,

they found the slave in good health. (Mt 8:5-10,13)

Most often we hear this gospel and hear that the centurion had faith and that as a consequence his servant was healed.

We think that ‘having faith’ means trying very, very hard to believe something. We think ‘having faith’ means squeezing our eyes shut and thinking good thoughts very, very hard so that good things happen.

Or we think ‘having faith’ means trying very, very hard to believe something which we think is probably not true, and if we believe enough then it really will be true after all. It’s all a bit like “if you believe in fairies clap your hands and Tinkerbell will live…”

Then I saw this story again. Here is a centurion. He’s a tough soldier with a tender heart. He lives in a particular way. He takes orders from above. He does what he’s told. There is a certain amount of trust in his superior, and even if he doesn’t trust his superior, he trusts in the virtue of obedience and order. It is the same with his slaves and soldiers beneath him. He says “come here” and he comes and “Do this” and he does it. The centurion lives a certain kind of life. It is a life of trust and obedience. He trusts. He obeys. This is the life he leads.

So then I saw that this was also what Our Lord meant by ‘faith’. It was not just trying hard to believe something which we really rather deep down know is all poppycock. Instead it is living a life of trust and obedience. It is knowing enough about God to trust him and then obey. It is knowing enough about Christ to trust him and obey. It is knowing enough about the Church and her teachings to trust and obey.

This is what faith is: it is being faithful. It is living a certain kind of life–a life of wave walking–a life of trusting obedience.

The centurion did not try very hard to believe something he thought was probably not true. He didn’t squeeze his eyes shut and try to have some sort of religious experience which made him feel all gooey and good. He didn’t summon up a belief by working hard at it. He didn’t ascribe to a set of dogmas and call that faith. He lived a simple life of trusting obedience, and when he encountered Christ he entered into that same simple trusting obedience with him.

This quality of character produced another quality: humility. The centurion—because he was a man of trusting obedience–was also humble. He was able to say in all sincerity and simplicity, “I am not worthy that you should come under my roof.”

This, then is faith: to know enough about God to put our humble trust in him, and then to obey him day by day and moment by moment. Do this and (as we say in the Holy Mass)…your soul will be healed.