

Is it possible to be too obedient?

"I was only following orders," was the defence of countless SS officers and Gestapo officers at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. Obedience to our superiors is thought to be all part and parcel of being a good Catholic.

So, is it ever possible for a good Catholic to disobey their priest or their bishop? Can criticism and whistleblowing ever be compatible with loyalty and faithfulness?

Jeremiah had a profound and deep sense of vocation. *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you. I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations."* But the institution within which Isaiah receives this vocation, its Kings, its princes, its priests and people, end up rejecting him and fighting against him. He had gone too far. He refused to toe the party line. Jeremiah had become the ultimate whistleblower on an institution that was totally corrupt and rotten.

And look how quickly they turn on Jesus. Initially he wins the approval of all, astonished as they are by the gracious words that come from his lips. But by the very next verse they were beginning to have their doubts. As his gracious words sink in, they begin to realise that Jesus, like Jeremiah, is challenging the very institution to which they belong, challenging the very nature of what it means to be a good Jew, challenging the very nature of what it means to be obedient.

For St Paul, it is all about love. It's love that speaks to our innermost heart. It's love that must motivate our every action. But loving people is not to be confused with just trying to blend in and avoiding conflict. Quite the contrary. Obedience to the God of love will take us to some strange places. Obedience to the God of love will often mean disobeying the Gods of power and wealth and calling time on abused and vested interests.

Yes, *"they will fight against you but shall not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you."* It is the Lord who speaks.

True obedience will always be a challenge but it will lead us to the heart of all things, to the Cross of Our Lord, Jesus.