Christian Commitment Reflects Christ's Obedience

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We are surrounded by signs of human fickleness, overwhelmed at times by the evidence that people seem to change their mind about very serious matters merely because an earlier decision no longer suits their self-interest. Nations break treaties and international law even though they would appeal to the same to protect their rights. Spouses promise to love each other "in sickness and in health," yet one may abandon his or her commitment precisely when the partner needs the signs of faithful love the most. Perhaps even more poignant is the case of parents abandoning their child, who received the gift of life with concomitant rights to physical, spiritual and intellectual nurture.

The prophets of Israel witnessed similar signs of human frailty in their time. They contrasted various forms of our inconstancy with divine fidelity. "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even if she should forget, I will never forget you" (Is 49:15). Imitation of God's love is the gauge whereby we are challenged to evaluate decisions we are considering. The divine gift of life as intimate union with God, offered through the Covenant, is either fostered or denied by our choices. Ezekiel warned the people who shared the Babylonian exile with him that each person is responsible for his or her eternal destiny. "When a virtuous person turns away from virtue to commit iniquity and dies, it is because of the iniquity committed that he or she must die. But if a wicked person, turning from sin... does what is right and just, that person shall preserve his or her life.... (18:26-27).

Many lessons can be derived from this passage, two of which are important for our purpose. We must never give up hope for a person who has failed, because throughout a lifetime God is calling that individual to live the human vocation more fully. On the other hand, those graced by God in a special way should never presume that they will always be faithful. To know God's will and accomplish it in the varying circumstances of life demands our constant prayer, as does our need for the gift of final perseverance. The solution to our own limitations is found in divine help "now and at the hour of our death."

For Christians the model of obedient love in fidelity to God's will is, of course, epitomized by the life and death of Jesus. In his letter to the Christian community in Philippi, St. Paul offered a succinct principle: "Have among yourselves the same attitude of mind that is yours in Christ Jesus" (2:5). Then he presented a beautiful hymn which perhaps was already being sung in the liturgy. It celebrates the generosity of Jesus in taking human nature so that we could be freed from the slavery to sin, self and Satan.

Recognizing that fidelity to our word, whether in political, social or other commitments is part of the meaning of love, we must turn frequently to God through the greatest and most efficacious
sign of love. That is, we must understand the cross of Christ. Do we think that we know the meaning of love? Not unless it includes the dimension of dying to self! Only by openness to God's gifts mediated through Christ's obedience unto death can we attain the freedom to give ourselves constantly and consistently.