Parable of the two sons
(From Conversation with God, Fernandez Carvajal)

The Lord was teaching in the Temple when he told this parable: What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today. 'And he answered; 'I will not'; but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Jesus asks his listeners, which of the two did the will of his father? They said the first son was the one. Jesus then reveals the supernatural significance of the lesson: Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him.

John the Baptist had shown the way of salvation, yet the Scribes and Pharisees, the people who were supposedly dedicated to God's service, did not take the Precursor seriously. They are symbolized by the son who said, I go, sir, but did not go to the vineyard. As far as anyone could tell, these officials were very rigorous in their observance of the Law. Yet when the moment of truth arrived, that being the testimony of John the Baptist, these religious leaders showed their true colours. They were not docile to the divine Will and the fulfilment of the Law. On the other hand, a great number of tax collectors and sinners responded to the Baptist's call for repentance. They are represented by the son who at first said I will not, but in the event went to work in the vineyard. He obeyed, and thereby pleased his father enormously.

The Lord himself teaches us by example: To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. By his obedience He brought about redemption. In the Second Reading for today's Mass, St Paul emphasizes how Jesus revealed his love for us through obedience: He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. The Romans and the Jews considered crucifixion to be the most degrading form of execution. Consequently, it was a punishment reserved for slaves and the worst of criminals. What a profound mystery lies in the fact that God the Son chose to do the Will of God the Father even to this utterly humiliating extent!

Christ obeyed out of love. This is the Christian meaning of obedience: that which we owe to God, that which we give to the Church, that which we give to our parents and those in authority over us. God does not want to be served by slaves or by robots. God wants to be served by his sons and daughters. He desires a willing and cheerful obedience that comes straight from the heart. St Teresa recalled how she once became envious of the penances done by a woman she knew. St Teresa would have done the same penances but her confessor prohibited her from doing so. She wondered whether it would be better to emulate her penitent friend rather than to obey her confessor. After a while, Jesus told her: My daughter, you are heading the right way. Do you see how much penance this woman does? Know that I have an even greater esteem for your obedience.