

Homily 7.4.16 - Liberty and Leadership

7/4/2016

What is on my mind... Liberty and Leadership

Luke 22:24-30 Who is the Greatest?

A different view...

Recently I had the privilege to accompany several high school students on a trip to Italy. Our trip was concluding just as Great Britain was voting to leave the European Union. It was interesting listening to the reactions of Italians and other Europeans as Great Britain sought to free itself from this association of member states and countries. The European Union came into being as the result of the devastation suffered throughout Europe because of the Second World War. The political experts and theorist at the time believed that European integration would be an antidote to the extreme nationalism that led to the devastation in Europe. Generally speaking people are not fond of the European Union, and many support Great Britain's vote to leave. Many feel that in trying to eliminate extreme nationalism, the EU has destroyed the distinctive cultures and ethnicities that held European countries like Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy together. It is worthy of note that Great Britain sees its departure from the EU as a move toward liberty. It is ironic that 240 years ago the leaders of our country sought a departure from the rule of Great Britain in pursuit of liberty... in a sense I guess you could say that we know how they feel.

Taking things for granted

Sometimes you have to go somewhere else to appreciate what you have. One of the things about living in a place like America is that it is easy to overlook and misunderstand what really and truly makes us a great nation. Especially, if you have never been anywhere else. Liberty is one of those things... in fact it is the thing, that makes us great. And so today as we celebrate 240 years of independence and freedom it is important to reflect on the concept of liberty, and the actions that makes liberty so valuable.

In the beginning... freedom for excellence

The concept of liberty or freedom goes back to the beginning of mankind and has a depth and richness that is sadly misunderstood today. In the beginning... the single most important gift that God grants to man is freedom. The Apostles and Church Fathers saw liberty as freedom from the slavery of sin. In their experience the only way one could appreciate the value of the gift of freedom was to seek the truth... For it was truth that makes one free. That truth was found in Jesus Christ... who was and is the way, the truth, and life itself. The uniqueness of this gift of freedom was its personal dimension... It was particularly applicable to human beings and was rooted in the idea of excellence as God sees it. It was being made perfect in God's image and likeness, with the purpose of becoming all we were intended to be. This sense of freedom is anchored

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in natural law, virtue, and self-discipline. It is freedom in its the richest and deepest sense.

Freedom from tyranny... and inalienable rights

A little over two centuries ago our founding fathers were captivated by an sense of liberty that would allow them to be free from oppressive restrictions imposed by authorities such as government. As they saw it... this was freedom from a tyranny that viewed its citizens as subjects, and continued to demand more and more from them. The basis for this sense of freedom is anchored in the truth that all men are endowed with inalienable rights... under God. Rights that cannot be taken or given away by anyone or anything. Rights that have corresponding responsibilities both to God and to ones fellow man.

Freedom of indifference...

Sadly we have come to accept liberty today as the power and scope to do as one pleases, where we are creating a culture of license. This is lowest sense of liberty... It lacks honor and is unworthy of the human person. It is the right to do as one pleases without regard for one's responsibilities or the rights of others. The basis for this freedom proceeds from our base animal instincts. It is not anchored in human excellence nor is it governed by human responsibility. It despises law, rules, discipline, and self-restraint.

Freedom... A Gift from God

We must always remember that our freedom... our liberty is a gift from God. It is a gift given to us (man) at creation... It is the first and most important gift we have. And because it is a gift from God, it requires stewardship. Stewardship is a particularly human endeavor, which requires proper leadership.

Who is the Greatest?

And that brings us to today's Gospel where the apostles were arguing about who was the greatest among them. Here we see the all-too-human characteristics of those who are chosen for leadership. The struggle for power, and the right to decide the direction of the future. Interestingly it sounds a bit like our current political rhetoric.

A different view...

However Jesus has a very different view of leadership. He starts by reminding the apostles of what leadership is not... Jesus reminds them that the pagan lords, who were in power, liked to make that power felt. He tells them that "this must not be so" with them. Finally Jesus presents himself as an example to them... "I am here among you as one who serves"... One who ministers to the needs of others. To Jesus real leadership is service and sacrifice. Real leadership meant dying to self so that others would have eternal life. This is the kind of leadership we need to cling to today. Sadly it is the kind of leadership that could never cooperate with a sense of freedom as we know it today... A

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freedom that anchors itself in the idea that we can do whatever we want. That is because it is the type of leadership that relies on responsibility for ones actions, and love and respect of ones fellow man. It is the type of leadership that is anchored in the rule of law, discipline, and self-restraint.

A spark still exists...

Fortunately this type of leadership, though lacking in our society and governing structures today, is not lost... A spark of this type of leadership exists in our hearts and also in our history. It is part of our heritage as a church. When Jesus called the disciples to lead His Church, He did not promise them that their leadership would make them powerful, rich or famous. He did however tell them the truth... He said that they would have to carry His cross. He left them with the knowledge that the right to decide the direction of things, came with the responsibility to lose ones very self so that others might live. So that others might come to know the truth. He showed them what human excellence looked like and the kind if impact it could have on the lives of others.

We are blessed...

And as for us in these United States... Well we were founded 240 years ago on a similar type of leadership... We have been blessed beyond measure... To be founded by men and women who believed in God, in the rule of law, discipline and self-restraint. We have been blessed by leaders who took their responsibility for others seriously... Even at the cost of their own lives. For them liberty was not some political theory or idea, it was a rare and precious gift given to them by God. For it they shunned power, wealth, and prestige, because they new its depth and richness... and most importantly it's cost. Their sacrifice for that depth and richness is noble in the truest sense of the word. But most of all we are blessed to be founded by men and women who clung to the truth that every person is made for excellence, and created equal in Gods eyes... With inalienable rights that no person or institution could ever take away

The standard of leadership...

When we look to those who want the right to decide the direction of our future... that is the only kind of leadership we should accept. Anything less profanes the original gift we were given by God. God Bless Our Church, God Bless Our Founding Fathers, and God Bless Us... The United States of America!