

Given that it's the 4th of July holiday weekend and our beloved country is preparing to mark our Independence Day this Tuesday, I think it's fitting that, as we celebrate our "freedom" as Americans, we truly reflect on the authentic meaning of "freedom" in the context of today's Liturgy of the Word.

So what *is* "freedom"? Freedom really has a two-fold meaning. First, according to our contemporary secular culture, "freedom" is popularly considered to be "the ability to do whatever you want." If this popular definition of "freedom" was embraced as the *most authentic* meaning of freedom, then taken to its extreme, obviously *anything*, including the most heinous evils could be justified. Certainly, in its most basic and *lowest* sense of meaning, *yes*, freedom *is* the practical ability of human beings to choose whatever they desire. Yet this is the most banal definition of freedom and one that doesn't really capture the true nature and purpose of freedom.

On the contrary, Christ's Church has a *higher* and *more dignified* view of freedom. In fact, the Catholic Church seeks to champion the truth, goodness, and beauty of freedom by proclaiming its authentic

meaning in all of its fullness. Christ's Church would properly define freedom as "the ability to choose the good" or "the ability to do what we ought." The "good" may be defined as, "that which will objectively benefit and satisfy us as human persons." And God is the Supreme Good or infinite Goodness itself!

The Church teaches that freedom, or free-will, along with reason, are the two basic spiritual faculties that make us human. God created us to be free, knowing that true love *requires* freedom. In other words, freedom exists *so that love could exist*. And so human beings possess free will *precisely* so that we may *sincerely choose God—so that we may sincerely respond to God's infinite goodness and perfect love for us*, which is offered through our Lord Jesus Christ. We were created with free-will so that we could love and serve God and others. Since freedom is *made for love*, it's designed to be selfless.

Moreover, I think the Church and our contemporary culture would agree on the secondary meaning of freedom in that one could also define "freedom" as the "state of not being imprisoned or enslaved." St. Paul famously proclaims in his Letter to the Galatians that "For freedom

Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.” Now what did our Lord and Savior free us from?

Christ our victorious Liberator has freed us from the tyrannical power of evil—He has freed us from sin and death. In today’s second reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, the Lord basically tells us that He came to give us *“the newness of life”—a new life of genuine freedom, virtue, love, peace, and happiness.* It’s *precisely* because our Savior came to transform our lives and to give us new life, that St. Paul goes on to say, “Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as *dead to sin* and *living* for God in Christ Jesus.”

Brothers and sisters, “being dead to sin” means *being alive* in the freedom of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we encounter our merciful Savior in the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation (Penance), He frees us from *our own sins that enslave and imprison us.* “Being dead to sin” means *basking* in the glorious freedom that our Lord and Savior has won for us through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

In liberating us from sin and death, Christ also seeks to free us from servile fear, stress, and anxiety that can burden us and eat away at

us. In transforming suffering through His Passion and Death, Christ wants to free us from the fear of suffering, rejection, and persecution. Our Lord Jesus wants to free us from the chains of resentment, anger, and grudges, especially in the context of our relationships with family members, friends, and co-workers. Christ wants to liberate us from the destructive slavery of *addiction*, whether it be to drugs, alcohol, pornography, gambling, social media, money, material possessions, etc.

In today's Gospel, our Lord Jesus gives us some conditions for following Him—for being one of His disciples. Our Savior challenges us to make Him first in our lives—to love Him above and beyond everyone and everything in our lives—to love Him *even more* than our own families. Jesus challenges us to remain faithful to Him in the *midst of suffering* and to persevere with love and humility.

Brothers and sisters, it is *only by selflessly dying to ourselves and giving our lives completely to Christ*—by making Christ first in our life, will we then discover the fullness of life and the freedom that we truly seek. It's *precisely through* humble and obedient discipleship in Christ that we will enjoy the freedom that we deeply desire. It's precisely

through *living* our Catholic faith and lovingly witnessing to Christ in the everyday affairs of our life that will we help make our country and the world a freer place.

So as we approach our Independence Day and reflect on the meaning of “freedom” in light of today’s Liturgy of the Word, we need to ask ourselves: even though I possess free-will, am I truly free right now in my life? If I’m not free, what is oppressing me? Am I seeking out the help that I need from God and others to become more free? Are there any sins or fears that are enslaving me and preventing me from living in the love and freedom of Christ? How am I using my freedom? What am I doing to help others grow in authentic freedom?

Brothers and sisters, we were created for freedom. God wants us to be truly free from all that may destroy us and prevent us from becoming the best version of ourselves—from becoming holy. As we prepare to worship and receive Christ our Divine Liberator in the Most Holy Eucharist, let’s thank Him for the freedom He’s won for us and let’s ask Him for the grace to preserve and strengthen our freedom so that we may always bask in the newness of divine life.