

14th Sunday
7/3/2022

A MISSION OF FREEDOM

This weekend in the civil calendar we hear words such as liberty, freedom and the like.

Jesus says to *ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest*. Now often in the Bible we're told to pray, but here told not just to pray, but what to pray for—laborers for God's harvest. Prayers for more people who will hear the call to share the gospel. Obviously, this need is great and one of my dreams is to see our parish become a fountain of healthy vocations to the Priesthood and consecrated life.

But there is also a broader understanding of this. The Church, by her very nature, is missionary and that means we're all missionaries; by the lives we live, by the words we speak, by who we are and by the example we give. In a special way parents are missionaries to their children. We're all called to share the gospel of Jesus, each in our own way. We are called to step out with lives of intentional faith. Whether we want to be or not, we're all missionaries who *in our daily lives either reflect the light of Christ or else block the light of Christ*. And most of us probably do some of both every day.

The gospel today can be summed up in one word: Mission. In the gospel, Jesus sends out 72 disciples. Their mission is to cure the sick, preach the kingdom and to prepare the way for Jesus. They are to free people from illness and ignorance and for love and eternal life. Jesus sends them out on a mission of freedom. They share in Jesus' mission of leading people in freedom, the freedom of the children of God.

This freedom reaches its highpoint through Jesus' Paschal Mystery; through the movement of his passion, death and resurrection that we celebrate every Sunday. When we share in the Eucharist we enter into that moment of Jesus' death and resurrection and here Jesus continues to feed us with himself.

Sin enslaves us and evil diminishes us and as our opening prayer puts it, Jesus came *to rescue us from slavery to sin*. Jesus comes that we might have life and have

it more abundantly. You could also say that he comes that we might have freedom and have it more abundantly.

Americans greatly value freedom. We refer to ourselves as, *the land of the free* and cities with names as *Independence* and *Liberty*. While we greatly value freedom, our understanding of it can be limited. We tend to look upon freedom in terms of choices, like items on a menu. Unfortunately, this can devolve into a slavery to one's own wants and passions that can take any number of forms. While this is certainly one understanding of freedom, it is not the only one, nor is it the most profound. Within the contemporary understanding, commitment seems to limit one's freedom.

There is however, another way of looking at freedom. It sees freedom as something that allows us to grow, mature and become more deeply the person God calls us to be. In this school of thought, commitment serves rather than limits freedom. This is the freedom of the children of God. It is not only a freedom from something, it is a freedom for something, for what has been called a freedom for excellence, for someone, for God. With this form of freedom, commitment takes on a new meaning. It has been said that as we make a gift of ourselves, as we give of ourselves, we find out who we are. Jesus said, *He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.* (Matthew 10:39)

In this line of thought, sin is a misuse of freedom or even a failure to use our freedom. When we sin, we fail to use our freedom and we become unfree. In sin we embrace a lie. Jesus said, *The truth will set you free.* (John 8:32) Freedom must be grounded in truth. Without this grounding, freedom becomes an unmoored ship floating aimlessly on the ocean of personal satisfaction. St. Paul says, *Remember that you have been called to live in freedom--but not a freedom that gives rein to the flesh.* (Galatians 5:13). St. Peter tells us, Do not use freedom as pretext for sin. Or as one patriotic song puts it, *and ground they soul in self-control.*

When a man and woman commit to each other in marriage, they in one sense limit themselves. But that same commitment allows them to grow, become and mature in a way they could not if they did not make that marriage commitment. It is through commitment and seeming to limit themselves, that they find a deeper form of freedom. Again, there's *a freedom from* and *a freedom for*.

So too, commitment to Christ and a gospel way of life may seem to some as limiting one's freedom and options. However, through such commitment we grow, mature and become more human, more the person God calls us to be. What appears like a limitation of our freedom, actually serves freedom, true freedom, the freedom found in Christ, the freedom of the children of God. Jesus enters into our world with a mission of freedom; to free us from sin and evil and to free us for love and eternal life. And he calls others to share in that mission. With deeper understanding, rooted in Christ, we can cry out, Let freedom ring. Let the freedom Christ offers us ring in our hearts, our lives and our world.