

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year “B”

July 5, 2015

Readings: Ezekiel 2: 2-5; 2 Cor. 12: 7-10; Mark 6:1-6)

It seems most appropriate on the weekend in which our country celebrates its 239<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence to reflect on the vitally important yet thorny issue of freedom, and how this affects us, the citizens of this nation in our daily lives. I claim no particular competence on this issue, one that has given rise to significant debate, some healthy and some quite damaging. We cannot escape the fact that we are citizens of two nations...that of our own land of our birth as well as citizens of the Church, the heavenly Jerusalem.

A key tenet of the Vatican Council II’s *Declaration on Religious Liberty* holds that “the human person has a right to religious freedom,” meaning that all people “are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.”<sup>1</sup>

But too often, religious freedom has been interpreted as a freedom *from* religion. The Vatican II document was a response to political coercion of religion, something about which we ought to be very concerned today. Similarly, one can speak of freedom of conscience if understood properly as a freedom from being coerced into submission against one’s will. Still, as Leo XIII rightly noted, “it is contrary to reason that **error** and truth should have equal **rights**.”<sup>2</sup>

In neither case may these freedoms be construed as endorsements either of a movement away from objective truth, or our solemn responsibility to be formed in the mind of the Church. The reality is

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7 December 1965, Paragraph #2 (emphasis added)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Leo XIII, encyclical *Libertas*, “On the Nature of Human Liberty,” paragraph #34.

that the Church does not endorse any particular political model, be it a monarchy, democracy, or a republic, provided that the necessary freedoms of religious association are maintained.

When St. Paul was struggling to control his passions, he appealed to the Lord on three occasions, and eventually heard the gentle voice of the Lord in his heart telling him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” God’s grace is sufficient in order for us to accept the reality of our own weaknesses in light of the many challenges that living a life of virtue presents.

Because of the lack of faith, Jesus could not perform miracles and wonders in his native place, his hometown in Nazareth. Whenever there is a flawed understanding of the relationship between freedom and authentic discipleship, the Gospel is hindered. What ought to be our proper response? I offer one word— courage. It is this courage that is the hallmark of an adult faith.

Think of the courage it takes for a teenager or young adult to stand up to the modern forces calling for complete autonomy in the area of personal morality? That courage comes from a well-formed conscience, and a well-formed conscience originates in a solid family life and attention to getting it right with respect to teaching about the relationship between freedom and responsibility, and knowing the difference between right and wrong.

Our nation justifiably celebrates our freedom this weekend. It took more than 13 years for One World Trade Center to be completed, the majestic building that arose from the ashes following 9/11. Let us never forget though, the cost of freedom, and the price of living a truly free life. We cannot expect the benefits of freedom without understanding the true meaning and price of freedom.

If we chase after the kind of autonomy that accepts no limits other than those we impose upon ourselves, we will remain spiritual infants, immature and frozen. Our founding fathers did not die for this kind of infancy and perpetual adolescence.

Approximately 500 veterans from World War II die each day in our nation, as time is catching up with their tremendous sacrifice. About 15,000 such Veterans reside here in our State of Minnesota. Millions more Americans served in Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf Wars. We honor all those who have made our freedom possible, and we commit ourselves to living as citizens of this great nation by honoring the true meaning of freedom, seeking to live lives of freedom in and through Christ Jesus, who is the very source of all authentic freedom.