

Homily: 14th Sunday: Cycle B: 2024: Ez 2: 2-5; Ps 123; 2 Corth 12: 7-10; Mk 6:1-6

“Are We using the Gift of our Freedom for Good or Evil?”

This past week we as a nation celebrated Independence Day. It’s a nice holiday, but it’s also a good time to reflect upon the true meaning of freedom, in light of our Faith.

1. **Freedom is a gift from God given to us human beings to enable us to act or not act in life.** We humans are not simply creatures of instinct, but we have the ability to choose. Freedom is the power rooted in reason and will by which we shape our lives. It is meant to be a force for growth and maturity, in truth and goodness. Unfortunately, we live in a world today that often sees freedom as license. The difference is: freedom as God intended it is to be used in the service of truth, charity and goodness; the world on the other hand thinks freedom means to be able to do what you want, when you want to do it - whether it is objectively good or bad, true or false. This is a philosophy of life that is basically **hedonistic**, which means in essence wanting to get as much pleasure from life as possible without any reference to ultimate truth, goodness, beauty, or love which can only be found in God. We see this played out in our public life over the last 50 years as courts and popular votes have led to many morally disordered things made legal, and so some think then morally ok, *be the “right” to contraception/ abortion, to pornography, to homosexual relations and marriage, and taking God out of our schools and public affairs.* It is not a recipe for ultimate joy. **When we lose sight of God, we lose sight of the purpose of human life and the dignity of the human person at all stages and in all forms.** We don’t think of the community or common good, or how it affects the youngest or most vulnerable members of our society, but simply at the core: how I can have my “rights” fulfilled without any reference to any responsibility. It is a very childish understanding of freedom.
2. **What are we as followers of Christ called to do amid this selfish understanding of freedom in so many sectors of our culture?** First, we need to realize that *doing what you want when you want to do it doesn’t lead to true joy or maturity, but in fact to spiritual slavery, misery, and addictions of various*

*sorts. It's only by beseeching the Blessed Trinity to mold us into their likeness that we come to see what true freedom really is: being a reflection of God in self-giving goodness. St. Paul puts this so nicely in the 2nd reading today when God tells him in the face of many struggles, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Yes, we are weak and can misuse our freedom, but God is stronger than our weakness. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us to take on the mind of Jesus, to embrace the demanding yet liberating teachings of Jesus on how we are to live and what we are to believe in: **objective truth, goodness, love and beauty.** Whether the modern world realizes it or not there is a blueprint given to us by God through the Catholic Church which leads to ultimate joy. You and I don't have to re-invent the moral and religious wheel, so to speak: to figure it all out ourselves is not a sign of great intelligence, but instead of pride and shortsightedness. What a burden and how depressing it is if we with all of our sins, weaknesses, and imperfections must figure everything out; instead, God in His kindness entices us to live in a spirit of trust in Him, and in love to enter into a living relationship with the Trinity which alone will set us free from all burdens.*

3. **Contrary to what popular culture teaches, the human heart in fact desires more than selfish pleasure, material objects, power, vanity, lust, and control of others.** Part of my call to the priesthood: *I thought as a teenager there must be more to life than these things I mentioned above; instead, I recognized the desire in my heart for ultimate truth, goodness, beauty and love which I discovered can only be found in God and the gift of the Catholic faith.* The more we grow in our relationship with God, the more we grow in authentic human freedom. We come to see that we don't simply want to live, but to have **a reason** for living! As St. Paul says, we are all called to bear the wounds of Christ in our bodies, the wounds of self-giving love, which is our "ticket" to Heaven. The saints show us truly how to use our freedom properly, for service not for selfishness: by growing daily in dying to self, living a life of practical charity expressed in works of goodness, with the foundation of a living relationship with God in daily prayer and acts of penance in reparation for our sins and those of the whole world. God bless you. †