

FREEDOM: GIFT AND RESPONSIBILITY

“Jesus wants us free, and this freedom - where is it found? It is to be found in the inner dialogue with God in conscience.”

– Pope Francis

OVERVIEW

Human freedom is the freely given ability to become who God created us to be and to obtain eternal life in heaven with God, all the angels and saints. By studying Scripture and the teachings of the Church and through consistent prayer with God, we are aware of this freedom and desire to use this freedom to please God. The more we seek goodness and justice, the freer we become.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is freedom and what is its purpose?
- What is the difference between individualism and authentic freedom?
- Why do we have to work to form our character and our conscience?

FROM BISHOP NOONAN

Religious Freedom in the Public Square - August 1, 2012

‘Never let evil talk pass your lips; say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them.

Do nothing that will sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed against the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, all passion and anger, harsh words, slander, and malice of every kind. In place of these, be kind to one another, compassionate and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven you in Christ’ Eph 4:29-32

Dear People of God:

I have chosen these words to greet you; you, the people of God. What does it mean to be a person of God in our world today? Do we greet each other as anointed? Do we celebrate the breadth of God’s love among us? Have we brought about a communion of persons through Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in our daily living?

St. Paul’s words to the Ephesians seem especially appropriate to me during this difficult time in our country. Recently, some of you questioned the Catholic Church’s advocacy on behalf of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters. I’ve received letters from you expressing difficulty because bishops throughout the country and I asked you to pray during the Fortnight for Freedom. You have written to me because your pastors have spoken openly about the beautiful gift of life from conception to death. You have questioned the use of the church, during Mass, as a forum for topics of the “public square.”

My dear people, let us remember again who we are. We are the people of God. God’s “public” square is found within the sanctity of the celebration of Mass. It is found within the walls of our churches and schools, and workplaces and homes. God’s public square is not put aside in certain times or places. From our baptism, we are called to make God’s presence known in all ways in all places at all times. God’s public square is our world.

What is this religious freedom for which we ask you to pray? It is the freedom, which we receive through the passion, death and resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is not the tangible freedom of this world. It is the freedom born through Christ’s suffering and ultimate forgiveness. We pray that we are able to bring the sacred to this secular world. Soon, you will be learning more about Amendments 6 and 8, two amendments, which will only be on the Florida ballot

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in November. Government has long recognized parents' natural rights regarding their children's education, health, and well-being. Particularly with a life-changing medical procedure such as abortion, the right of parents to protect their child's welfare must be restored. To restore this right, the 2011 Florida legislature proposed constitutional Amendment 6, which opens the door to future legislation requiring parental consent for minors seeking an abortion, and would also prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars to fund abortions. I ask you to vote yes on Amendment 6.

I also ask you to vote yes on Amendment 8. By eliminating a clause placed long ago in our state's constitution that discriminates against religious institutions, Amendment 8 preserves time-honored public-private partnerships between government and social service organizations. It also ensures continued delivery of crucial social services by faith-based organizations, such as the Catholic Church.

May we speak and act as people who will be judged by the law of freedom.

Fortnight for Freedom - June, 2012

Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. - (2 Timothy 1:8)

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Our world is one filled with false gods. We live in the midst of this sinfulness and we are called to proclaim the Gospel through the thick of it, boldly and fearlessly. In order to proclaim the Gospel well, we must first know what we believe and live our faith to the best of our ability.

We believe that Jesus Christ, as it is written in Scripture, is the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments. We believe that we are called to love one another as He loves us. We believe the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ. We believe that in our communion with the Eucharist, we become one Body in Christ. And, we believe in God, the creator of all life, and because of this, life is sacred from conception to natural death. Mary, the mother of Jesus, in her yes to become the temple for the Son of God, showed us the sacredness of life when she accepted the Gift of Jesus. Christ came not so that life would be taken away but so that life would be restored through, with and in God. As one Body in Christ, we believe that we are not only responsible for ourselves individually, but we are also responsible for the faith of each other and we tend to this faith through our participation in the life of the Church.

Our faith is not a private matter. The Church plays a role in the promotion and attainment of justice and protection of the common good. We are called to be steadfast witnesses to the love of Christ even in the face of controversy and great debate.

In the last few years, we have seen our ability to practice our faith slowly erode and compromise the ministries of charity and service in our Church. The Health and Human Services (HHS) Mandate is an example of this. The health mandate does have a great effect upon us. Our faith requires us to bear responsibility for one another. If we believe that all life is sacred from the moment of conception to death, then providing for health care coverage is

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Fortnight for Freedom - June, 2012 - continued

important. But mandating health care coverage which does not uphold the teachings of life and goes against what we believe is unacceptable. Requiring Catholic hospitals, universities, and institutions which do uphold these teachings of life must now provide drugs to assist with the destruction of life also diminishes our ability to practice our faith. The payment of our insurance premiums will also subsidize abortion inducing drugs, even though we do not believe in this culture of death.

The first amendment of the Bill of Rights says: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” In its current form, the HHS Mandate prohibits the exercise of our faith. That is why we say this is an issue of religious freedom.

For generations, Catholic hospitals, schools, and charities provided services as the hands and heart of Christ in our communities. If the HHS Mandate is not reversed, the Gospel message of life would be at great risk. It saddens me that these institutions, the breath of our faith, may expire.

In response to these direct affronts to our right to practice our faith, I and bishops throughout the United States ask you to participate in a **Fortnight for Freedom**, **fourteen** days dedicated to prayer, penance, and rededication to our Lord, Jesus Christ, beginning on June 21 and ending on July 4, the celebration of Independence Day in the United States. During this time, we are called to pray that the practice of our beliefs; of our faith will be preserved for generations to come.

Let us be heralds of the Gospel. Let us be a people of prayer. Let us pray that these issues will be resolved in the Lord’s name. Let us shine forth the Light of Christ to one other. Let us join with each other to write our legislators consistently about the regrettable consequences of the HHS mandate. Let us pray what we live and live what we pray.

Religious Freedom at Risk - February, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly, and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. The federal government, which claims to be "of, by, and for the people," has just dealt a heavy blow to almost a quarter of those people—the Catholic population—and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced last week that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees' health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be forced to include those "services" in the health policies they write. And almost all individuals will be forced to buy that coverage as a part of their policies.

In so ruling, the Administration has cast aside the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to

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Catholics our Nation's first and most fundamental freedom, that of religious liberty. And as a result, unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled either to violate our consciences, or to drop health coverage for our employees (and suffer the penalties for doing so). The Administration's sole concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

We cannot—we will not—comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Our parents and grandparents did not come to these shores to help build America's cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture, only to have their posterity stripped of their God given rights. In generations past, the Church has always been able to count on the faithful to stand up and protect her sacred rights and duties. I hope and trust she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

And therefore, I would ask of you two things. First, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail, and religious liberty may be restored. Without God, we can do nothing; with God, nothing is impossible. Second, I would also recommend visiting <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection/index.cfm>, to learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty, and how to contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision.

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MEDIA RESOURCES FROM THE BISHOP GRADY MEMORIAL LIBRARY

To reserve resources from the Bishop Grady Memorial Library, contact BGML@orlandodiocese.org, call 407-246-4895, or visit the website at: www.orlandodiocese.org/ministries-offices/bishop-grady-memorial-library

- CD-0168 Becoming Who You Are
- DVD-0117 Beatitudes, Our Blessings
- DVD-0576 A Living Faith: Themes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- DVD-0681A-E Faithful Revolution series
- DVD-0620 Nine Days that Changed the World
- DVD-0672A-I The Great Adventure Bible Study series
- DVD various Little Rock Scripture Study
- DVD-0435 Faithful Citizenship: A Matter of Conscience
- DVD-0344D Being Catholic: How Catholics Live
- CD-0130 Introduction to the Theology of the Body

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SAINTS AND PRAYERS

St. Ivo of Kermartin (patron saint of advocates) Feast Day: May 19

St. Ivo Born was born to a wealthy noble family. From age 14 he studied civil and canon law, philosophy, and theology in Paris and Orleans. As a lawyer, he practiced in both civil and ecclesiastical courts, often defending the poor without charge, and ministering to them in prison while they awaited trial. He practiced great personal asceticism, with frequent fasts. He fought the state over taxes and the rights of the Church. He was ordained a priest in 1284. He resigned his legal position in 1287 to tend to his parishioners at Tredez and Lovannec. He built a hospital from his own funds, tended the poor in it, and gave away the harvests from his land to feed them.



St. Thomas More (patron saint of lawyers) Feast Day: June 22

Thomas More was born into a noble family in London in 1477 and studied law. He enjoyed great fortune with the ascent of Henry VIII, who used him for diplomatic missions, had him knighted in 1521, and made him lord chancellor. He came to oppose the king, however, and refused to support him as the head of the English Church against the Roman Catholic Church. In 1535, he was accused of treason, imprisoned, and beheaded. A celebrated man of letters, More was the author of “Utopia” among other works. Beatified in 1886, he was canonized in 1935 by Pope Pius XI.



A Prayer by St. Thomas More

Give me the grace, Good Lord to set the world at naught.

To set the mind firmly on You and not to hang upon the words of men's mouths.

To be content to be solitary. Not to long for worldly pleasures.

Little by little utterly to cast off the world and rid my mind of all its business.

Not to long to hear of earthly things, but that the hearing of worldly fancies may be displeasing to me.

Gladly to be thinking of God, piteously to call for His help. To lean into the comfort of God. Busily to labor to love Him.

To know my own vileness and wretchedness.

To humble myself under the mighty hand of God.

To bewail my sins and, for the purging of them, patiently to suffer adversity.

Gladly to bear my purgatory here. To be joyful in tribulations.

To walk the narrow way that leads to life.

To have the last thing in remembrance.

To have ever before my eyes my death that is ever at hand. To make death no stranger to me.

To foresee and consider the everlasting fire of Hell.

To pray for pardon before the judge comes.

To have continually in mind the passion that Christ suffered for me.

For His benefits unceasingly to give Him thanks.

To buy the time again that I have lost.

To abstain from vain conversations.

To shun foolish mirth and gladness.

To cut off unnecessary recreations.

Of worldly substance, friends, liberty, life and all, to set the loss at naught, for the winning of Christ.

To think my worst enemies my best friends, for the brethren of Joseph could never have done him so much good with their love and favor as they did him with their malice and hatred.

These minds are more to be desired of every man than all the treasures of all the princes and kings, Christian and heathen, were it gathered and laid together all in one heap.

Amen.

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SAINTS AND PRAYERS

Prayer for Religious Freedom

O God our Creator,
From your provident hand we have received
our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
You have called us as your people and given us
the right and the duty to worship you, the only true God,
and your Son, Jesus Christ.

Through the power and working of your Holy Spirit,
you call us to live out our faith in the midst of the world,
bringing the light and the saving truth of the Gospel
to every corner of society.

We ask you to bless us
in our vigilance for the gift of religious liberty.
Give us the strength of mind and heart
to readily defend our freedoms when they are threatened;
give us courage in making our voices heard
on behalf of the rights of your Church
and the freedom of conscience of all people of faith.

Grant, we pray, O heavenly Father,
a clear and united voice to all your sons and daughters
gathered in your Church
in this decisive hour in the history of our nation,
so that, with every trial withstood
and every danger overcome—
for the sake of our children, our grandchildren,
and all who come after us—
this great land will always be “one nation, under God,
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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DOCUMENTS AND WEBSITES

USCCB Search for these titles at www.usccb.org.

- Issues and Action: Faithful Citizenship (also available in Spanish)
- Issue and Action: Religious Freedom
- Parish Guide to Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

Vatican Search for these titles at www.vatican.va

- Dignitatis Humanae (On Religious Liberty, Second Vatican Council) (En Español)
- Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses: The Eucharist, Proclamation and Gift of Freedom

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FREEDOM: GIFT AND RESPONSIBILITY: SCRIPT

“Jesus wants us free, and this freedom - where is it found? It is to be found in the inner dialogue with God in conscience. If a Christian does not know how to talk with God, does not know how to listen to God, in his own conscience, then he is not free - he is not free.” - Pope Francis (June 30, 2013)

“But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit that you have leads to sanctification, and its end is eternal life.” Romans 6:22

Human freedom is the freely given ability to become who God created us to be and to obtain eternal life in heaven with God, all the angels and saints. By studying Scripture and the teachings of the Church and through consistent prayer with God, we are aware of this freedom and desire to use this freedom to please God. The more we seek goodness and justice, the freer we become.

Freedom results from our union with Christ. In Christ, we are free from sin, which is separation from God. That's real freedom based on faith

“We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin”. Romans 6:6

Jesus brought us freedom from death - not physical death, but set us free from sin, which brings about spiritual death – by dying and rising from the dead. The risen Lord overcomes death and we await eternal life in Christ.

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” Matthew 5:6

In the Gospel, Jesus uses the Beatitudes to teach us what qualities we should freely share in our relationships. He calls us to be “blessed” by choosing lifestyles that benefit others and are not based on selfishness. He calls us to be sensitive and compassionate to those in pain, to be gentle, forgiving, modest, peaceful, respectful, and courageous in our path of discipleship.

“For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 5:13-14

Freedom can also be distorted to be viewed as a personal license to do whatever I want to my body, my family, my possessions, or to ignore social responsibility. When we separate freedom from the truth of the Gospel, freedom can become an expression of sin.

Every person has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being, the two go hand in hand. We are born with the God-given gift of reason which helps us choose the good for ourselves and others because authentic freedom is expressed in relationship to others. True freedom cannot be exercised individually from a selfish perspective. It is experienced most profoundly in community through compassion.

“Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness” (CCC no. 1731).

Catholics believe that if our choices are based on the truth of God's love, rooted in compassion, then we collaborate in transforming our world into the kingdom of God. If not, our choices can lead to pain, suffering and inhumanity. Authentic personal freedom based on Jesus Christ, is the root of a well-ordered and just society and includes the freedom to exercise the right of religious expression, among other rights.

“But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does.(James 1:25)*

With a well-formed and informed conscience, the Church calls us to seek the Truth in all matters especially in regard to religious freedom which is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. The Eucharist expresses the mystery of Christ's freedom, the gift of liberation; it means love to the end, for only love can liberate. Sharing our life in Christ and in communion with our brothers and sisters, we freely share our gifts and resources, we make moral decisions that take the other into consideration and that promote the good of others and not just ourselves. The risen Christ is the source and measure of the fullness of all freedom.