

22B SML 2018
MK 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

In a world that divinizes the will, and holds that true happiness comes only when you have the license to do what you want, when you want, with whom and to whom you want, how you want, and where you want; and that any restraint to a higher authority is unjust, oppressive and to be defied;

In a society that urges us to keep all options open, not to be tied down, to always be ready to move on to something more attractive, to place conditions on all promises, to protect our own interests above all else, to move up and make more, and to demand rights and resist restrictions . . .

The world says, society says, “We just want to be free to choose . . .” However, freedom implies not just a mere choice but also responsibility for choice.

There are two definitions for freedom. One is false. One is true.

The false definition of freedom is “Freedom is the right to do whatever I **please**.” This is a liberal doctrine of freedom, which reduces freedom to a physical, rather than to a moral power. Freedom to do as I please means I am free to go on a shooting rampage. I am free to drive my vehicle on the

sidewalk. These are freedoms terrorists choose. So freedom needs to answer to the common good, and answering to the common good, one is not free to do whatever one pleases.

The true definition of freedom is “Freedom is the right to do as I **ought**.” Ought implies goal, purpose, morality and in the end, the law of God. True freedom is within the law, not outside it.

I’m free to draw a triangle as long as I follow the laws of geometry and the triangle has three sides. I’m free to add as long as I follow the laws of arithmetic, and $3 + 3 = 6$. I’m free spiritually as long as I obey the law of God.

Let’s be practical. The universe is governed by laws. Things are this way and not that way. By submission to laws we make them our own. For example, if we obey the laws of the body, we keep it healthy. If we obey the laws of the mind, we keep it learned.

However, once we hear words like “law” and “obey,” the red flags go up, because as I said earlier, we want freedom, not obligation. So we start to calculate more or less. No more. No less.

Today’s gospel addresses measured love and what’s wrong with a scrupulous following of the laws. Our Blessed

Lord doesn't want to throw out the laws, to throw out the baby with the bath water, or scripturally, to throw out the wheat with the weeds, but wants to get to the impetus, the driving force of following the law: doing what's required because it's required, or doing what's required because of love, unmeasured love? Jesus came right out and said it, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." But sometimes our nature wants a measured compromise. Here's a great example from scripture, putting yet again, last week and again this week, Peter in the limelight.

The disciples were fishermen. Repeatedly in the gospels (MT 4:20, MK 1:18, LK 5:2) these fishermen were recorded as having nets, nets plural, more than one. While teaching the disciples, Jesus instructs Peter to let down his nets, plural for a catch. Peter's response is, "Lord, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; but at Your word, I will let down the net" (singular).

In other words, Simon was far from convinced. He was not prepared to challenge Him, but neither would he obey wholeheartedly. Even the title Simon used in answering Jesus reflected the ambivalence of his attitude. "Master," he said, the same word Judas would use when he betrayed Him, a word

without hint of recognition of the Divine, at most an admission of His status as a teacher, a rabbi. You can read Simon's mind. "What does He, coming from Nazareth, know about the way to fish in Capernaum, at this time of day, who would dream of catching fish? The professional fisherman knows that night is the time to fish, and we have worked all night for naught.

So to humor Him, he let down a net, one net, a measured compromise. Our Blessed Lord asked for nets. Peter compromised with a net. Our Blessed Lord asked for obedience and what He got was a begrudging response. The flesh is not spirit; reason is not faith. Peter, relying on reason, let down a net. He flung into Our Lord's face the bitter cry of life's unfruitful hours. But when the net caught a quantity of fish so great that it was near breaking, suddenly there appeared from behind the bulk of Simon the servant Peter. "Simon Peter fell down and caught Jesus by the knees; 'Leave me Lord, for I am a sinful man.'" LK 5:8

Jesus is no longer "Master," but "Lord."

Simon is no longer Simon, but "Simon Peter."

As long as you are following the rules just to follow the rules, as long as you think of Jesus as "Master" and not "Lord," then we settle for a net when He calls for "nets."

German pastor and theologian (although Lutheran [bless yourself]) Dietrich Bonhoeffer says this:

Prayer is not a free will offering to God; it is an obligation, something He requires.” But duty does not need to be grim. Do we think just because many of the Psalms we love were born out of the context of ritual ceremonies that they had no joy in them? Do we think that just because Peter and John went up to the temple at the regularly appointed hour of prayer that there was no spontaneity in their words to the lame man: “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk?” Or that this man went about the temple “walking and leaping and praising God” with clenched teeth? (AA 3:1-10) No. When undertaken in the power of the Spirit, acts of duty can be filled with great joy and blessing. In fact, duty is “the sacrament of the present moment.”

Like the Psalms, the Church has ritual ceremonies. They are called the Mass. Like Peter and John, we have regularly appointed hour of prayer. Masses in Church are offered at 7:30, 9,10:30 and 12. There is no reason to think there is no joy in our rituals and our appointed times to pray, unless of

course, our response is measured, as was Simon's, who put down a net rather than nets.

Like any human institution, the Church is flawed. American journalist, social activist, Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, and Catholic convert Dorothy Day, always understood the flaws of the Catholic Church, but she also understood the necessity of the structure. Last week I quoted her as saying there are times the Church is the spotless bride of Christ and at other times, she is the whore of Babylon (the recent headlines). However, the radicals around Dorothy Day saw, and the radicals of today see, only the flaws and want to throw everything away, the baby with the bath water, to be more scriptural, the wheat with the weeds. Day writes:

It is as though the adolescents have just discovered their parents were fallible and they are so shocked they want to throw out the institutions of the home and go in for 'community' . . . They call them 'young adults' but it seems to me they are belated adolescents with all the romanticism that goes with it . . . I can't stand romantics. I want a religious realist. For me, Christ was not bought for thirty pieces of silver, but with my heart's blood. We buy not cheap on this market.

Her point is it is hard to love the Church, because the Church has been flawed since the gathering of the Twelve, and will be flawed until the Second Coming. What makes this even harder to swallow is the considerable gap between the moral standard of the Church (which is good, which is wheat) and the practice of individuals, especially those who are held to a higher standard (which is mortally sinful, which is weed). For those who do not meet those standards, the higher the standards, the wider the gap.

So for Bonhoeffer and Day and so many like them, let's keep the standards, let's keep the Church, let's not throw out the baby with the bath water or the wheat with the weeds. Rather, just the bath water, just the weeds, so Our Blessed Lord could paraphrase the line from today's gospel with one distinct difference:

This wheat honors me with their lips,
and their hearts are not far from me.