

A high school teacher of twenty years of experience is all too familiar to the common complaint of his students. A disgruntled youth, who was chafing under parental restrictions, commonly complains “They don’t respect my freedom. I want to do my own thing. Just like all my friends.” Don’t miss the **subtle contradiction**. He wanted to be free — to *conform to his peers*.

On this **Fourth of July weekend**, when we celebrate America’s independence, the Gospel tells us that the disciples were sent to preach to the nations, and then to condemn those who would not heed them. “Shake the dust from your feet.” “A fate worse the Sodom.” What kind of freedom is that? Well, they are free to choose...

**Freedom** is not a **self-evident** concept. It is more of a **paradox**. **St. Paul** tells us, in the same breath, “Be **slaves of Christ**, for the truth of Christ will set you free.” **Jesus** said that he came to proclaim “Liberty to captives” by following his commandments. Reading this, **an outsider** might accuse a Christian of exchanging one bondage for another.

Even more from those who are *speaking to a Catholic Christian*: “You have so many rules that tie you down and keep you from being the free person you could be.” As one **Hollywood star** put it, “If it feels so good, how can it be so bad?” **Message**: Living out your faith keeps you from enjoying life.

When **Pope John Paul** visited St. Louis, he spoke at the Cathedral ecumenical service on the **Ten Commandments**. He said, “The Ten Commandments are the **Magna Carta** of human freedom.” How does “Thou Shalt Not” make you free?

One might contemplate **this paradox** with regard to my **priestly vows**. Am I truly free when I live under my vows? Are those who wear **wedding rings** free? Yes, we are free, because **true freedom** is the freedom to do the **right thing, freely**. Any pretense of freedom which implies **license** or **absence of all restraint** is a false freedom, a **slavery** in disguise.

**A free country** that begins to turn its backs on the **Ten Commandants** – which is written in the fabric of every nation – will begin to see its own **destruction** and a loss of all freedom.

Just think of the extremely **dysfunctional family** where all honor, fidelity and faith is absent *verses one* where, honor, fidelity and belief are central. Who is the most content, the most free? The one that cares enough to **set limits**.

+ **A twelve year old** accidentally killed one of his **family's geese** by throwing a stone. Figuring his parents wouldn't notice one of twenty-four gone he buried it. **His sister** saw his crime and said, "I saw what you did, and if you don't wash the dishes for me, I'll tell mom." **The boy** did the dishes for days. One day, **the boy said**, "You do them." **His sister** said, "I'll tell mom." The **boy replied**, "I already told her and she forgave me – I'm free again."

To do **the wrong thing** is not freedom but **slavery to evil**, as is **an addiction**, which actually **destroys liberty**. Anyone who struggles with an **addiction** knows this **paradox of freedom**. **Alcoholics** and **drug addicts** know it only too well. So do those *hooked* on...\_\_\_\_\_? I will leave that **bank** for you **to fill**.

Living in such a way, one will eventually find, "If it tasted so good, felt so good, why do **I feel so bad?**"

The point is, once I say of anything, "**I have to have it**," it means that I am no longer free. Incidentally such **addiction** can reduce and even eliminate **moral culpability**.

The popular **American notion of freedom** is not the same as the **freedom of faith**. The salvation offered **by Christ** is freedom from **sin** and **death**. The **children of God** are freed from *slavery to sin* and the eternal death of sin. "Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you. Rejoice rather because your names are **written in heaven**."

Such **freedom** from **sin** and **death** is *not only eternal joy*, but also an **earthly liberty**. The truth of Christ sets us free. It shows us the right use of freedom. And the **grace of Christ** can free us from **slavery to our desires**.

+In a **Family Circus** cartoon, the little boy asked his dad, "When will I be old enough to do as I please?" His father answered, "Son, no one has ever lived that long." That might be applied to faith.

The **eternal life of heaven** IS doing whatever we please, because there we desire only goodness.

**Augustine**: "Love God and then do whatever you want" is another way saying it here on earth. We are truly free when we freely desire to do what is right.

A **recovering alcoholic**, for example, can walk past a tavern and say, "I am free. I do not have to go in there." That is true freedom. A **cured shop-o-holic** can walk through the mall and say, "I am free, I do not need to buy all these things." Maybe

that is why Jesus tells the **72** to bring so little. As one put it, “In the spiritual life, we grow not by addition but by **subtraction.**”

To be **unburdened** true freedom. And **a Christian** can walk through life and say, “I am free. I have no desire to do what is wrong.”

Only that kind of **freedom** will always leave us with the *peace of Christ*, **despite our circumstances.** It is a freedom that comes from **within one’s faith in God.** That is why **Paul** could say from the chains of his prison, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!”

That is the freedom of the children of God. In the terminology of the teenager, referenced at the start of my homily, I am truly free when “my own thing” becomes “**God’s thing.**” Then I can do my own thing, just like all **God’s friends.**