

**5th Sunday of Easter
May 2, 2010 (5:30 pm)**

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I wonder if anyone else noticed the opening prayer this evening. It was the prayer I just voiced for all of us a few minutes ago: “Lord...give us true freedom and bring us to the inheritance you promised.” Freedom is what the whole church prays for this week.

Did you notice that little adjective before freedom? “True” freedom. That must mean there is such a thing as “false” freedom? Have you thought much about that lately? Or at all? True freedom: what is it?

Do you ever think much about whether you are really free? I don’t. At least not much. And there are lots of different kinds of freedom. As a psychologist I do think quite a bit about of psychological freedom. As a minister of the gospel, I also think about spiritual freedom: the freedom for which Christ came in the first place, St. Paul tells us.

But I do not think about other kinds of freedom much—except when I read stories or watch TV about places in the world where there seems to be so little freedom. But in this country and at this time and place in my everyday world, the thought doesn’t much cross my mind. I’m not in prison—at least not at the moment—so, in that sense, at least, I’m free. We enjoy freedom of

religion; we can believe, or not, anything we wish. We enjoy freedom of the press. So we can believe, or not, anything we read or hear. And no one unduly coerces many of us without our taking recourse under the law to adjudicate the situation.

So in lots of ways, I am free already. What do you suppose Jesus might have meant then? None of those freedoms I just mentioned are false freedoms. But are they his kind of “true” freedom?

You will remember, I’m sure, that the bible talks a great deal about freedom. It was freedom from slavery that prompted God to create the Covenant with Abraham in order to set God’s people free. It was freedom from idolatry and sin that prompted God’s promise to Moses.

In the New Testament, listen to Zechariah’s song at his son John’s birth (this canticle is prayed every morning in the Divine Office of the church): “This was the oath God swore to our father, Abraham, to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to serve God without fear...” (Lk 1:73-74). Listen to St. Paul, in his usual blunt fashion: “...for freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1).

What are they all talking about? We are free, aren’t we? The great German poet, Goethe, offered a caution we might heed: “None are so

helplessly enslaved as those who falsely believe they are free.”

There is a much more profound freedom of which Jesus speaks today. He says to *live in me* is true freedom. To *love like me* is true freedom. And Jesus says this just as he is about to offer his life for friends who have already begun deserting him.

The freedom that allows us to love each other—in deeds as well as in words and sentiment—is the foundation of the “new heaven and new earth” that the Book of Revelation speaks of today. In the New Jerusalem there is nothing but freedom, and honesty, and truth.

“Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know you are my disciples.” This is the Promised inheritance. Come into the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the earth. There you are truly free.

But surely I am not the only one who notices that this is not the present reality of the church. This is all lovely but a tad abstract. The New Jerusalem must still be descending from the clouds. Because surely this ain't it! A good number of voices have suggested in recent weeks that in our church we are again at a crossroads the likes of which we have not seen in hundreds of years. And as usual, it seems to be all about sex—a favorite church topic. But it is not primarily about sex at all!

An entire culture of fear not freedom seems to have permeated us. A culture of secrecy and duplicity has replaced the gracious openness of which the Acts of the Apostles speaks. A culture of power not service seems to dominate our ecclesial landscape. There is little love evident these days.

And it all reveals to me that we are anything but truly free as a church. Some of you may be thinking: “That’s not me. I didn’t do anything. It’s just the hierarchy.” Don’t be too quick to start placing blame only there. There is blame enough in this most recent fiasco for all of us. Trust me; I’ve been personally involved in this so-called “crisis” for over twenty years. There is no simple cause; there is no simple solution. That’s why I don’t talk about it much publically. Most people don’t want complex answers. Simple ones are easier to digest—even if there’s no nourishing in the eating.

The National Catholic Reporter editorialized on Friday of this past week (April 30, 2010) in agreement that this sex abuse crisis is not about sex. But then they went on to say: “The sex abuse crisis is actually a hierarchy crisis....” It is more than a hierarchy crisis. It is about us all.

We all poison the atmosphere of today’s church each and every time we cater to the fear in our hearts rather than to the freedom for which we were born. We do it by omission and by commission. Our inheritance is freedom,

not fear. And both are choices we all either make, or don't. For every abuse of power, for every secret held so close in darkness, for every fear of scandal in the church, there are enablers. And some of them are us. "We" are all not yet truly free.

The poet, W.H. Auden, has a little ditty that succinctly describes the dynamics of all true freedom. He says:

"If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try;

If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd better start to die."

Now what was that prayer I voiced for us all? "Lord...give us *true* freedom and bring us thereby to the inheritance you promised."

The church is ours! Fragile and sinful and hurting terribly—but ours. So are the invitations and the challenges. God says again today: "See I am making all things new." Let's give God a chance—through us. Anyone want to say AMEN?