

The Confessor's Tongue for July 5, A. D. 2020

4th Sunday after Pentecost; Ven. Athanasius of Athos

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

On True Freedom

Fr. Justin Frederick

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 8:31, 32

Independence Day marks the birth of the United States as an independent nation, for on this day the Continental Congress formally declared political independence from the English crown. With this, Americans celebrate their freedom. That liberty was never absolute, but was limited, and in the first instance, it meant liberty from the King of England and freedom for the colonists to govern their own affairs.

Liberty and freedom are widely used as synonyms take to mean the condition of being able to do whatever one likes, summed up in the oft-used American phrase, "It is a free country; I can do as I like." Among European language, English is unusual in having two words to describe this condition. "Liberty" derives from the Latin *libertas*, while "freedom" derives from Old English. Sometimes the words are subtly differentiated with "freedom" being taken to mean the ability to do what one wills within one's ability and liberty to mean the absence of arbitrary restraints on a person apart from the limitations imposed by the rights of others. For example, one may have the ability and will to murder (be free to do it), but one is never at liberty to murder.

In discussions of freedom, it helps always to ask the question "freedom from what"? For the American colonists, it was freedom from the British crown and parliament to organize their affairs according to the English Common Law they had brought with them. But that liberty still allowed each state to institute a state church and limit the actions of persons in ways most Americans would find objectionable now. The Roman citizen had liberty, especially in comparison to the non-Roman subjects of the empire, but that liberty was far from absolute. In fact, many peoples under many different types of government talk about having freedom in conditions modern Americans would not consider to be freedom. Often this freedom means little more than not being subject to foreign rule.

Americans continue to value liberty or freedom. Indeed, we have come to worship it as the Romans worshipped their ancient god Liber and the goddess Libertas. But the modern American understanding of freedom is often a corrupt one. It is more akin to license to do whatever one wants, from which the negative word "licentiousness derives". Often it has to do with being free to violate God's moral law without shame or social condemnation. While real freedoms relating to private property (in the fullest sense) and

its use declines, American freedom grows in areas of sexual practice. Man strives to be free of the limitations of his nature and God's moral law. This is a perversion of freedom, and represents a turning of God's grace into licentiousness. Sinful man strives to be free of all restraint that hinders the immediate gratification of his will. But such freedom is nothing but slavery.

The Christian cannot take "freedom" in the absolute sense of freedom from restraint. He is limited by his human nature. A man is not free to be a woman, nor a woman to be a man. A father is not free not to be a father. Man is not free to define himself or make himself to be whatever he wants. His being with all its potential is given by God and limited by the Creator's intent. Moreover, man lives in the Creator's world and is subject to the Creator's laws.

From what, then, is the Christian free? In Christ, he is free from sin, death, and the devil. This freedom is accomplished in principle at Baptism and Chrismation, and its implications and full manifestation are worked out over the course of a Christian's life.

First, the Christian is freed from the devil and his tyranny. Satan out of envy works to ruin man and deprive him of his divine destiny. He does not seek man's good. He takes vicarious pleasure in seeing man made in the image of God enslaved to sin and miserable. The Christian has been transferred from the rule of the god of this world to the rule of Christ. The devil has no more legal claims to him.

Second, the Christian is freed from death. Fear of death enslaves men. It feeds the philosophy "you only live once" and "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die." It provides leverage to manipulate man through threats: "Do this evil thing or I will kill you." The Christian's knowledge of the coming Resurrection frees him to lay down his life for others without regret.

Third, the Christian is freed from sin. Through spiritual rebirth and the gift of the Holy Spirit, power is present in the Christian to transform him and conform him to the image of Christ. Sin is no longer in control, dominating the man. It may take years for the Christian to learn how to abide in Christ and His grace and how to listen to the Holy Spirit so that he does not keep sinning, but sin is no longer master.

In Christ, the Christian is free to choose the good and do God's will in all things. This choice brings him eternal well-being and represents the fulfillment of what God made him to be. This is not an absolute freedom to do whatever he wants; rather, it is the freedom from the external tyrants of sin, death, and the devil that enslave a man and keep him from doing God's will. It is freedom to choose the good. It is freedom to do God's will. It is freedom to become like Christ and god by grace and so fulfill the destiny

of man made in God's image.

This freedom in Christ has political consequences. The Christian submitted to Christ and his rule may be considered to be self-governed. He is not a slave to his passions. He does not need to be restrained by force or threat of punishment from doing evil, for he hates evil and wants only to do God's will. He knows he will one day answer to God for his words and deeds, and this motivate him to avoid all evil. Called to love his neighbor, he considers his neighbor's good and not just his own. Seeking treasure in heaven, he does not seek earthly treasure to the harm of his neighbor. A Christian, then, is an ideal citizen of any state. He is honest, does not take bribes, works honestly and diligently, and does not resort to crime. The early Christian apologists were quick to point out to persecuting Roman emperors that Christians were their best citizens. This was true under the Communists as well.

If the self-governed, Christ-governed Christian is an ideal citizen, the sin-enslaved servant of Satan is not. Dominated by his passions, he seeks to gratify them as quickly as he can. His focus is on himself and what brings him pleasure. Other humans appear to him as only the means of achieving his own pleasure. Not able to restrain himself, he requires external government to compel him out of fear of punishment to obey the laws that make life in society possible.

The disorder of our society is the product of disordered man driven by his passions with no internal restraint. Politics then becomes the forum where citizens compete with one another to try to achieve the fullest satisfaction of their own sinful desires.

Faith in Christ alone can free man from this condition and prepare him for eternal citizenship in the kingdom of God as well as rendering him a good citizen of the earthly realm.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

Christ commands His followers to "let their light shine before men" and not to hide it.

Christ Himself is the Light of the world; He brings light to an otherwise dark world. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). He imparts His light to those who follow them. Thus, we are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. "For ye were sometimes [at one time] darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

Our lives are to reflect Christ's light so that

others may see our good works and give glory to God. A good work is anything done for Christ's sake that helps meet someone else's physical or spiritual need. Such works draw the attention of others to God.

Christ instructs us not to hide our light, for that is an utterly irrational thing; one does not light a candle and then cover it so the light cannot be seen. Light is meant to be seen, it enables sight, and the very presence of light drives out darkness. Darkness is nothing in itself but the absence of light, much as evil has no existence in itself but only as a corruption of the good.

We let our light shine by not being ashamed to identify ourselves with Christ and being known as Christians. We make the sign of the cross when we pray. We do not hide that we go to church. We bear witness to the truth of Christ with our words. But it is critical that our lives support our words—that our piety not being in word only but in deed.

Our being light and letting that light shine will not be without conflict. As Jesus said, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love the darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:19-20). Some will flee from the light in our life; others will lash out at us, hating our presence which exposes sin in their lives. But we must let our light shine nonetheless.

Are we letting the light of Christ shine, manifest in our good deeds shine, or are we hiding it? Or perhaps we have allowed that light to be dimmed by fellowship with darkness? We are instructed to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" for "it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Ephesians 5:11-12). Light and darkness and mutually exclusive, and as we are now children of light, we can no longer participate in "unfruitful works of darkness."

Christ transforms human life. Christ's life present in man creates saints who reflect Him who is Light. This work of Christ is a great work, and it needs to be seen by sinful men that they may perceive the presence of God in the world and come to glorify Him. The saints do not promote themselves or act out of vainglory to be seen by men and gain their approval. But God has a way of making them known to others that He might be glorified and needy men may be drawn to Him. Christ transforming us creates the good works that, when seen by men, will bring glory to God.

Are we keeping this commandment of Christ to let our light shine in our dark world, or are we hiding our light or even dimming it through participation in unfruitful works of darkness? If we are not, may we find the grace of repentance to be obedient to His will. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!