

Fr. Jeff Martin

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

True freedom is found in Christ and in His Church. In the Church we find the grace from God to make our Yes mean Yes and all that we need to properly form our consciences. This is a great gift for us as we follow the call of the New Evangelization in order to propose a healthy, loving, truthful alternative to various subtle and not so subtle lies that contradict Catholic Culture as well as the Natural Law. Embracing the gift of freedom in Jesus Christ, we can be that good friend in the midst of society who introduces the Faith to someone in a paralyzing grip of false teaching, lack of faith, or a misunderstanding of the Faith.

Today's Gospel tells us how important it is to have good friends, friends that look out for your well-being, both physically and spiritually. The 4 friends that brought the paralytic to Jesus were filled with Faith and eager to respond to what they believed in, Jesus could heal the man.

Good friends bring you to Jesus. Good friends are those who stick with you when you get knocked down.

And I think this image helps us realize the value of coming to Jesus and surrounding ourselves with people who can assist us on our journey to Christ; no matter how difficult that might be. We see the 4 friends were creative in lowering the sick person from the (the roof). It is like they were climbing for their friend when he was paralyzed and not able to walk to the Lord.

Also, the authority of Jesus is seen in this passage. Two very important points come out as well; that is Don't Doubt... Have Faith, and recognize the healing Power of Christ. Physical and Spiritual Paralysis may be healed by Jesus Christ. We see here what goes on and has the potential to happen in our day in the Sacraments of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick. There is a spiritual healing that takes place in these Sacraments and at times a physical healing may occur in the Anointing of the Sick. Listen to some of the words of the rite of Anointing: "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit... May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." The possibility of the Lord freeing us from our sins is made manifest in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. We are able to surrender to the Lord's healing touch. Before we may experience weariness due to our sins but after confession and or anointing of the Sick we are given the commission as Isaiah speaks of in the first reading to remember not the events of the past. God is doing something new in us. We are then able to be ambassadors of Reconciliation in Christ leading others like the 4 in today's Gospel who took the paralytic to Jesus. We receive God's mercy and are called to lead others to it!

In the spiritual life, we are often tempted to look back at our sins and believe that they are not forgiven. Jesus' words today in the Gospel are meant for us as we leave the confessional or receive the anointing of the Sick... "I say to you rise pick up your mat and walk" We are called to walk forward with the Lord. We are called to live in the present moment. The grace found in the Sacraments and a dedicated prayer life help us to increase our love and fidelity to Christ and His Church. Also, this grace allows us to be friends that invite, or maybe carry people to Truth and Freedom.

In our world and in our nation today we need God's help more than ever in order to guard this true freedom and a properly formed conscience. As we watch the news these past weeks in relation to the Human Health Services Mandate, we are compelled to look to our bishops and support them. In light of the possibility of this healthcare mandate, Catholics and all people of good will can raise their voice because the foundation of this mandate goes against freedom of religion especially relating to the practice of the holy virtue of chastity, not to mention the all important need to safeguard the respect of human life that may be endangered with abortion covered within this mandate. Pope Paul VI's voice is still quite relevant today. His letter, *Humanae Vitae*, says much to help us put into proper perspective the negative effects Contraception has had in our world and our nation since last century. I read the document again this week (it's short) and I wanted to share with you just one paragraph that, I believe, speaks to where we are at today and a confirmation on why the *HHS Mandate* is a problem. Paragraph 17 reads, "It is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of anticonceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion." (HV 17). The last 40 years have seen this lack of respect for the woman play out in many ways. It is seen in the many unhealthy relationships that are not open to both the procreative and unitive aspects of marriage. In short, there is a built in temptation for lack of commitment within marriage, or couples (in this case the man) may never commit and be tempted to see the other as an object. We see an increased divorce rate over the last 40 years that can be related to this trend, not to mention the

explosion of the use of pornography that only increases the view of especially women as objects only for selfish enjoyment.

Pope Paul VI continues in paragraph 17 with the following, “Let it be considered also that a dangerous weapon would thus be placed in the hands of those public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies. Who could blame a government for applying to the solution of the problems of the community those means acknowledged to be licit for married couples in the solution of a family problem? Who will stop rulers from favoring, from even imposing upon their peoples, if they were to consider it necessary, the method of contraception which they judge to be most efficacious?”... [e.g. HHS Mandate] ... “In such a way men, wishing to avoid individual, family, or social difficulties encountered in the observance of the divine law, would reach the point of placing at the mercy of the intervention of public authorities the most personal and most reserved sector of conjugal intimacy.” (HV 17). You can see this sense in other Church documents that I would say are prophetic for this issue in our day. For example, in Pope Leo XIII’s, *Arcanum* (On Christian Marriage), we see it made clear the problem of government interference in the observance of the divine law connected with married couples.

Using information like this, we can be that voice, that good friend, in society who helps others see the truth and freedom found in chastity. It is important that we stand together with our bishops, know our faith, and practice our faith so that we can carry people in our society out of unchaste mandates that compromise religious freedom to the peace and healing found in Christ and His Church.