

Ordinary Time 13C 2016

Serving in Love

For the past several weeks our second reading has been taken from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. This is an important letter for understanding our Catholic faith because it speaks about what God has done for us Jesus Christ. In today's reading, for example, St. Paul writes: "For *freedom* Christ has set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." He then adds: "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather *serve one another through love.*"

The freedom of which St. Paul speaks is the freedom that only God can give us: it is the freedom that frees us from the power of Sin and Evil that rules over our lives. Before we came to faith, we were under a power stronger than we are; we were under the power of Sin that led to Death. But when we heard the Word of the Gospel and believed in Christ, God did something for us we could not do for ourselves; God freed us from the power of Sin and Death.

However, St. Paul understands how easy it is to misuse our freedom, even our freedom in Christ. For example, for some people freedom means doing *whatever* they want, *whenever* they want, *however* they want. "Don't infringe on my freedom. Let me do what I want to do, when I want to do it." This is the kind of "freedom" that makes us selfish. This is the kind of freedom that paralyzes us so that we cannot make a commitment to anyone or to anything. This is the kind of "freedom" that enslaves us to Sin all over again. That is why St. Paul goes on to write: "serve each other through love."

Serve each other through love! What a marvelous way of thinking about freedom. This is Christian freedom; this is the freedom we enjoy in Christ—the freedom to serve each other through love. We are most free when we use our freedom for others, for something good and worthwhile. We are most free when we serve each other through love.

Christ set us free from the power of Sin so that we would be free to serve each other through love. Christ set us free from the power of Sin so that we could be of service to each other. Christ set us free from the power of Sin so that we can imitate him by serving each other through love.

I have seen this kind of freedom in parents who sacrifice what they want to do so that they can serve their families in love. I have seen this kind of freedom in spouses who sacrifice their wants and needs for the sake of their spouse, especially at moments of sickness and death. I have seen this kind of freedom in unmarried parishioners who do not have their own family but dedicate their lives to others or to a worthwhile cause so that they can serve in love. And yes, I have also seen those who misuse their freedom by thinking that if they can do what they want when they want it they will be happy. And of course, they never are.

The happiest people I know, the people I most admire, the people I want to be like are those who use their freedom to serve others in love. They are the ones, the only ones, who understand what St. Paul means when he says that for freedom Christ has set us free. This is why we do not use our freedom for our own desires but to serve others in love. For only when we serve others through love are we truly free.