

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year “B”  
July 3-4, 2021

*Faith and Freedom*

Readings: Ezekiel 2: 2-5; 2 Cor. 12: 7-10; Mark 6:1-6

The *American Freedom Train* toured the country in 1975–76 in order to commemorate our nation’s Bicentennial. At age 12, I was sufficiently impressionable to recall the celebrations, and it served as good news following the ending of the contentious Vietnam War, a little more than a year earlier. It consisted of 10 rail cars carrying American treasures across the country, with stops in all 48 contiguous states. It included **George Washington’s copy of the Constitution**, the original Louisiana Purchase and even **Judy Garland’s *Wizard of Oz* dress!** It made its stop locally right around my birthday in August of 1975.

People were starting to feel better about our country; we were rebuilding following Vietnam and Watergate. We recited the Pledge of Allegiance daily; television stations began the day with the Star-Spangled Banner after ending the broadcasts for the evening. No 24/7 news in those days.

The 245th anniversary of our nation gives us an opportunity to reflect upon our faith and our freedoms. Are we true to the ideals of our Founding Fathers? Consider: “We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America...appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, (declare independence)- And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor”.<sup>1</sup> These words are filled with meaning.

Do we rely on the protection of Divine Providence and appeal to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions? While we cannot single-handedly effect change, we certainly can love our country’s ideals, striving to apply our Catholic faith to our daily lives. We change our nation one person at a time, beginning with ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> (Declaration of Independence; emphasis added)

We cannot escape the fact that we are citizens of two nations...that of our own land of our birth as well as citizens of the Church. A key tenet of the Vatican Council II's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* holds that "the human person has a right to religious freedom,"<sup>2</sup> implying that coercive state power ought not be put behind the truth claims of any religious body.

The problem lies in one's interpretation of religious freedom. Suffice it to say, some key principles are at stake. May one pursue religious freedom when this leads away from the truth? Is there a "right" to be wrong? It is a complicated question, requiring more development than is possible now.

Similarly, one can speak of freedom of conscience if understood properly as a freedom from being coerced into submission against one's will. But as Pope Leo XIII rightly noted, "it is contrary to reason that **error** and truth should have equal **rights**."<sup>3</sup> In neither case may these freedoms be seen as endorsements of a movement away from the truth, or our duty to be formed in the mind of the Church.

The Church does not endorse any particular political model, be it a monarchy, democracy, or a republic, provided that the necessary freedoms of religious association are maintained. We have a duty both to seek the truth and submit to it when we recognize it. We cannot justify our ignorance to truth if we do not use our God-given gifts to discover truth.

Because of the lack of faith, Jesus could not perform miracles and wonders in his native place, his own hometown in Nazareth. Imagine how painful that must have been for him in his human nature. A fundamental lack of understanding the nature of freedom and autonomy hinders the furtherance of the Gospel. We cannot expect to reap the benefits of freedom without understanding the true price of freedom. Saint Paul comforts us in his Letter to the Corinthians, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

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<sup>2</sup> *DIGNITATIS HUMANAE*, December 7, 1965, para. #2

<sup>3</sup> Pope Leo XII, *Libertas*, 1888, paragraph #34

Yes, at times we abuse our freedom through sin, but even here, God provides a remedy. However, if we chase after the kind of autonomy that accepts no limits other than those which we impose upon ourselves, then we are spiritual infants, immature beyond description. Our founding fathers did not die for this kind of infancy and perpetual adolescence.

We honor all those who have made our freedom possible, and we commit ourselves to living as citizens of this great nation by honoring the true meaning of freedom, seeking to live lives of freedom in and through Christ Jesus, who is the very source of all authentic freedom.

May we strive to live the ideals both of our faith and our country, seeing no contradiction between them. May God speak to our heart and bless our nation abundantly.