

Last week's article took up the topic of human freedom. This is a good topic to continue with on Easter because true freedom is not an end itself but rather something needed and used to reach our true purpose, our true final end intended by God, which is a glorious participation in the Resurrection of Christ. With the Resurrection, our Lord created a new way of being human, as Pope Benedict XVI once put it, something far more magnificent than we can even imagine, something far greater than even what Adam & Eve had in the Garden of Eden. The God-intended use of genuine freedom is necessary in order to participate in this Resurrection to Life.

Last week's article brought out that genuine human freedom is not something man-made. It was created by God and thus God alone can say what it is, what it's for, how it is to be used. True human freedom is not: I can do whatever I want, whatever my desires lead me to; that's the "freedom" of an animal. True human freedom is the capacity to choose what is truly good. Freedom is the capacity to exercise our free will according to its created purpose, which is to choose what is truly good, ultimately, to choose relation with God, to choose to love God. Love is not a feeling, it is an act of the will. Mutual love between a person and God is what leads to the person's participation in the Resurrection of Christ. Thus, freedom is necessary for human fulfillment.

Freedom, the capacity to choose what is truly good, that which leads to a person's only true fulfillment, pertains to both the interior and exterior of the person, and there can be encroachments on both. If Mass, for example, was made illegal by civil law, that would be an impediment to exterior freedom. An impediment to interior freedom is something like that which a drug addict or alcoholic might experience. They might truly want to be free of it yet there is some sort of interior compulsion driving them to drink or use drugs; they cannot easily just take it or leave it, there is an impediment to their interior freedom.

Exterior freedom is something good. It is a matter of justice to ensure that it's present, it is something that government, businesses, sports, etc should ensure. Work schedules that force a person to choose between making a living and getting to Mass on weekends is a lack of exterior freedom. Sports schedules now also all too often impede exterior freedom. People speak a lot about (exterior) freedom in our country today and yet these real encroachments on genuine exterior freedom are all too often readily accepted or even applauded.

While exterior freedom is good, it is not absolutely necessary for salvation. In the first 300 years of the Church, for example, there was little to no exterior freedom for those seeking to follow our Lord and yet there were hundreds of saints during that time. We can't use lack of exterior freedom as an excuse to not follow the Lord. Interior freedom, on the other hand, is necessary for salvation and is thus, by far, the most important. The martyrs of the early Church were willing (i.e., had interior freedom) to give up their lives rather than deny the Lord. They did not interiorly (in their mind, in their soul, in their free will) cling to this life; they had the interior freedom to give it up rather than deny our Lord.

How does a person attain to true interior freedom? As mentioned last week, our free-will will "naturally" seek the true good if it is not impeded. The key to interior freedom, then, is to remove all interior impediments. We will return to those impediments. Before doing so, though, it has to be acknowledged that a person has to want to be free, they have to want interior freedom or they will never seek it and thus never have it. Pope St John Paul II addressed this in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* using the rich young man who approached our Lord and asked what he must do to have eternal life. Commenting on this event, John Paul said: "For the young man, the question is not so much about rules to be followed, but about the full meaning of life. This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting *which sets freedom in motion*." Raising this question and seeking seriously the answer, John Paul said, is the beginning of interior freedom. A few months ago there were bulletin articles on leisure and its true purpose. Perhaps we can begin to see how all of these things tie together and form a single whole. There has to be time (leisure) to raise and ponder serious questions in our mind. One of the basic questions is, as John Paul says: what's the meaning of life? This question sets in motion the quest for real freedom. Real freedom is not so easy to attain. It requires real self-denial and so there has to be good reason to pursue it and stick to it. The fulfillment of life, our very life (i.e., participation in the Resurrection of Christ), our ultimate happiness depends on it.

Let us return now to impediments to interior freedom. Last week's article briefly mentioned two – probably the main two, the first of which is incomplete knowledge or false belief. It was noted that a person's free will acts in conjunction with the intellect: the intellect must know the true good and the will has to choose it. We can't possibly choose the true (and ultimate) good, which is relation with God or the will of God, if we don't know what that means. John Paul brought this out as well, except that he spoke in terms of truth rather than knowledge. After bringing out a number of popular false beliefs (presuppositions), John Paul stated: "At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth." There can be no freedom without the objective truths given to us by the Creator, by I Am Who Am. To believe otherwise, is just kicking the goad. Recall our Lord's words: The Truth will set you free. He meant that literally.

What is called relativism is a very prevalent false belief today (John Paul brings this out as well). God is objective reality or truth. Objective just means some truth that is outside of me and doesn't depend on me. The sun is an objective reality that doesn't depend on me. So is the truth about God and thus the truth about ourselves and what God has revealed. Relativism says that there is no objective truth or reality – the only thing resembling truth, so says relativism, is whatever is true to you, whatever you think, whatever your preference is – that's it. Two people can hold "truths" that are directly contrary to one another (e.g., abortion is ok, abortion is wrong) and both are true, says relativism, because the only truth is what's true to you. It is perhaps believed by some or even many today that relativism is the ultimate satisfaction of human freedom. Such a belief perhaps also sees freedom as an end in itself, rather a means to an end – to the ultimate happiness of the Resurrection. Is relativism true? Here we return to I Am Who Am. God is the Creator and He made us to be in a certain way and we're going to ultimately be miserable unless I am in that way – just like a person with a distorted body will be physically miserable. Relativism is intrinsically atheistic. And yet how many Catholics embrace it, and with great self-righteousness to boot. People will say things like: oh I know what the Church says (i.e., teaches *definitively* by her God-given authority) or I know what the bible says about this or that (some area of sexuality is a common one today) – in other words, I know what God says but here's what I think. This rejection of truth is not genuine freedom because genuine freedom, as created by God, is something that makes us like Him and thus brings us happiness. This is like a person who says: I'm free to stick my bare hand in a fire and burn it to a crisp. Yes, in a sense you are or at least you can do that. But then you are not free, in a bodily way, to be like you are meant to be. You are no longer free of pain, you are no longer free to use your hand in the way it is meant to be. We do the same thing with our soul when playing God by deciding what is right and good and true, in opposition to what God has revealed. The law of God, as John Paul notes, is not in opposition to true freedom, it is rather directions on how to be free. Don't stick your hand in the fire is not a restriction on human freedom, it is rather a law that makes you free to have a hand that is as it should be.

The self-righteousness that is almost invariably associated with relativism (I know what God says but this is what I think) seems to often come from a false belief of love. Freedom of the will ultimately means the capacity to choose love, love means willing the best for the other, but I have to know and accept the God-given truths in order to do that. Thus, relativism is not genuine love or freedom but leads rather to a tyranny of self-interest. We see this expressed in a plethora of ways today: Me and what I want, shout down all others. The last 3 popes have all decried the scourge of relativism, and frequently so. The horn has been sounded.

In the space left, let us return to the other big impediment to interior freedom: sin. Here we will also include original sin and its effects. Anyone who sins, our Lord said, is a slave to sin. St Augustine said: The first stage of freedom is to be free of crimes (i.e., sins, especially mortal sin). Sin makes a person a slave (unfree) in two ways. One is rather objective: you are held in bondage by the sin, by Satan, and you cannot free yourself from it. Our Lord has to come with His mercy. However, sin also leads to slavery by habituating ourselves to it, making myself desire it more – like that of drugs or alcohol. The will is weakened and even if there is desire to break free, the sin has a hold over me. Finally let us note that Augustine says "the beginning of freedom." It's not the end because of the passions (desires) disordered by original sin. Persistence, however, leads even to freedom from this distortion.

*Happy Easter and God bless you, Fr Kuhn*