



For the last 2 weeks the bulletin articles have focused on the topic of freedom. Freedom is the capacity to choose what is truly good, ultimately the freedom to choose God and all that He has revealed. There are two dimensions of freedom – exterior and interior. Exterior freedom is often determined by society or civil government. If the government passed laws against Mass, that would be an encroachment on exterior freedom.

Exterior freedom is important. As mentioned before, economic structures or business practices can impede exterior freedom, as can sports schedules for kids. Political correctness and other forms of peer pressure can also be an impediment to exterior freedom. Catholics must insist on exterior freedom in the public sphere.

While exterior freedom is important and something Catholics should seek to safeguard, interior freedom is, by far, the most important dimension of freedom. Are we not always interiorly free? Does man not always have free will? The answer is yes, he does always have free will but his interior freedom (the capacity to exercise that free will to choose the truly good) can be hampered. For example, if a person is controlled by fear – afraid, let's say, to do what is right – their free will (the capacity to choose what is truly good) is hampered. Complete or perfect interior freedom means that a person is free of all such hamperings. External freedom could be severely impaired but the person could still be interiorly free. Recall the example of St Maximillian Kolbe.

To choose what is right and good and true, a person has to *know* what is right and good and true. Failure to study the faith, what God has revealed, then, creates an impediment to freedom. Beyond knowing, understanding, and accepting the truths of the faith, the 2 main impediments to interior freedom are: 1) the disorder caused by original sin, and 2) personal sin.

The disorder caused by original sin has been described multiple times before, although perhaps not in terms of impairing interior freedom. The effects of original sin on a person's interior are: a dimmed intellect, weakened will, and the disordering of the passions. The passions are a person's feelings, emotions, appetites, and desires – things like fear, anger, pleasure, and so on. When originally created, these things directed man (Adam & Eve) to God. Anger, for example, would have driven back evil (its good use) but then ended. Love and affection would never have degenerated to lust; fear would have been directed, for example, to a hesitancy to offend God. But with original sin, these things actually pull man away from his greatest good. Anger becomes bitterness and grudge-bearing. Affection is affected by self-interest. We have the seed of our own self-destruction embedded within us. These passions, rather than pushing us towards our true good actually pull us away from it. We're inclined towards evil, towards self-enslavement. St Paul spoke of this, *after* his conversion on the road to Damascus, when he said: I do not do the good I desire to do (with my mind) but I do the evil I do not desire to do (because I yield to the passions that pull me in that direction). Virtue is what makes the passions as they are meant to be. For example, the virtue (habit) of fortitude moderates (or controls) fear. Virtue doesn't just happen. It's something a person has to choose to do, a firm decision, a firm commitment in everyday life. It is not so easy. It takes conscious effort and often a real interior struggle. Anyone who pats himself on the back for having always and even easily been virtuous is not virtuous, he's just blinded by pride.

While the passions alone certainly hamper interior freedom, sin is the real enslaver. There are 3 sources of temptation to sin: the flesh, the world, and the devil. The flesh refers largely to the passions. Thus, one of the consequences of disordered passions is sin. Our Lord said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Our Lord wants us to be free because He wants us to be Heaven with Him for all eternity. Perhaps now it is not so hard to see why He comes with a message emphasizing His Divine Mercy.

Faithful people today look and see much evil in the world. Although sexual immorality is rampant, it is by no means the only thing. Greed and pride also go unchecked. Evil is called good and good is called evil. The vices of self-exaltation and mockery of God are considered virtue. Even the existence of objective truth is out of vogue. There are many options of what to make first and foremost, God does not even make the list for most people today, and all too often Catholics go along. People have fallen away from the faith in droves and families are in disarray, with the language of love (sacrifice) now considered a bad word in most families. A truly honest person will also look at their own self and find plenty of evil there as well. Not since the time of Christ has man turned so decisively away from God and towards evil, towards death and destruction. We might look at all of this and say: why doesn't God do something? Are you sure He hasn't?

In August of 1905, a Polish couple, Stanislaw and Marianna Kowlaska, had the 3rd of their 10 children, a little girl they named Helena. Even at a young age Helena wanted to go to a convent and become a nun. Her parents objected, however, because they needed help supporting the family. After several pleadings, Helena finally let her desire fall to the wayside and became somewhat worldly, chasing after vain things. Then one night when she was 20 years old and at a dance with her sister, she saw a vision of our Lord as He was during His Passion. He looked at her and said simply: how long will you make Me wait? She left the dance immediately, went home, packed a bag, left a message for her folks, and went to Warsaw (Poland) where she was eventually accepted into the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, and took the name Faustina. It was here that our Lord came to her multiple times with messages for the whole world. The central message was for man to return and embrace His Mercy, the last hope for modern man as our Lord put it to Faustina.

Why hasn't God done something? He has. But He has not, nor will He, just wave a magic wand and make everything better without man doing anything. Man has given up His freedom, our Lord offers to restore it but man has to cooperate with it. Man has made himself a slave, the Son of Man offers to free him: If the Son sets you free, then you are free. And how does that happen? Man has to desire it. He has to see and acknowledge his sins, be deeply sorry for them and committed to turning away from them and turning towards God, go to Confession, and then go and live out his firm purpose of amendment. Yes, this is the way and there is no other. Does it seem like too little? Well, if it is so easy, why not do it? Are you God? Do you know what the consequences for others will be if at least you yourself do as our Lord has asked?

It is helpful, indeed inspiring, to recall some of the things that our Lord said to St Faustina. He wanted devotion to His Divine Mercy built up. What did this entail? For one thing the Sunday after Easter was to be designated Divine Mercy Sunday. Faustina recorded all of our Lord's messages in a diary and after she died, His requests worked their way through the Magisterium of the Church, especially through the efforts of the Polish Cardinal, Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope St John Paul II. In the year 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized St Faustina and declared the Sunday after Easter Divine Mercy Sunday. Our Lord made special promises for that Sunday. Jesus said that on that day, the *floodgates* of His Mercy would be opened. Let no soul, our Lord said, fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. A little more sample of what He said to Faustina: You will prepare the world for My final coming. Speak to the world about My mercy ... It is a sign for the end times. After it will come the Day of Justice. While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fountain of My mercy. Tell souls about this great mercy of Mine, because the awful day, the day of My justice, is near. But perhaps most relevant of all for us on Divine Mercy Sunday is this quote from our Lord: whoever approaches the Fount of Life (Confession) on this day (the Feast of Divine Mercy) will be granted *complete* remission of sins and punishment." This is a tremendous promise.

Jesus also gave Faustina a special prayer to help build up devotion to Divine Mercy. It is called the Divine Mercy chaplet. While this Chaplet can be prayed at any time, He especially asked that it be prayed at 3 pm, the hour of His death. He also showed her an image of Himself and told her to have it painted and that it should be venerated by the faithful. Finally He told Faustina that priests should preach and teach His mercy and asked that the Church have special devotional practices to His Mercy on Divine Mercy Sunday. What should we do, say no to our Blessed Lord? Of course not. The times and places for the Divine Mercy celebrations are in the bulletin.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn