

“WHAT PRICE SLAVERY?”
SUNDAY ORDINARY 13 C
Based on Galatians 5:1, 13-18
FOR JUNE 27, 2010 – CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Next weekend, the July 4th weekend,
we celebrate our Country’s birthday
and our freedom as Americans.
St. Paul is talking about freedom
and slavery this weekend and he’s talking
to the Church at Galatia.

*“My brother and sisters,
you were called to be free.”*

That’s what Paul said.
If you’re familiar with
Paul’s writing you know
that it could be the shortest
sentence he ever wrote.

I once had a friend tell me
that he really liked his Church
because you “. . . were free to believe
anything you wanted to
and your behavior is your
own business and nobody else’s.
No one tells you what to do.”

Is that the freedom for which
Christ has set us free?
Does our Christian freedom

mean the freedom to think, act,
and be anything we want?

I don't think that's what
St. Paul had in mind.
He encouraged us to
"become slaves of one another."
So, how is it possible to believe
that freedom means to become a slave?
Aren't those two notions
complete opposites?

Most of our present day ideas
about freedom come from the Greek notion
that the truly free people
are those who enjoy a comfortable life
free from worry.

They have the money and the time
to be able to do whatever they want

- travel overseas
- live in big houses and entertain friends
- spend more time on the golf course
- drive the newest cars
- wear the best clothes.

So why then do we have the
Bernie Madoffs of the world?

It's because we know how flimsy
this kind of freedom really is.
Here today and gone tomorrow.

And we know that wealth
can easily lead to another kind of slavery
– slavery to wanting this year’s
“new and improved” model.
The more we have,
the more we want.
Is that freedom?

When St. Paul speaks about freedom,
there is nothing said about being
free of responsibility,
or being free to do as you please,
or being free to use other people
for our own selfish needs,
or being free and unrestrained
when it comes to sex, drugs, alcohol, stealing.

What St. Paul is talking about
is not that kind of freedom.

And it’s clear this is the reason
he is writing to the Galatians.
They were abusing their freedom
by the way they were treating one another.
We don’t know precisely how
they were doing that,
but he says to them
*“You, my brothers and sisters,
were called to be free.
But do not use your freedom
as an opportunity for the flesh;*

rather serve [be slaves to] one another through love.”

There was a farmer
who lived in a modest country home
with his wife.

Their children had grown up and left home.

For many years he and his wife
cared for his eighty year old
mother suffered from dementia,
was blind, and also incontinent.

Their entire lives had to be adjusted
to care for his mother.

Some people admired them
for their love and patience,
others said they were foolish
– haven't they heard about nursing homes?

Why did they do this?

The husband answered:

"It's a privilege for me to give back
some of the care which my mother
gave me earlier in my life.

Fortunately I am blessed with
a job which has some flexibility,
a loving and understanding wife,
who by the way does a marvelous job
caring for Mom's personal needs.

I am so happy that I am able to do this for her."

I think that's the sort of slavery that St. Paul speaks of.

Now, I know there are those of us
who can't make the same response
as that farmer and his wife.

Yet, I feel there are many other times
when we can show the freedom
that Christ gives us and adjust our lives
to the needs of others.

In other words, we become their slaves
as we seek to find ways
to help and support them
in their particular time of need.

And remember, as slaves
we don't want to leave a stone
unturned in trying to fulfill
our duty of showing Christ's love
to those who need that love.

And as slaves we don't do
any of these things for reward or praise.
Our hearts are gladdened
when we come across
someone who demonstrates this attitude
and goes out of his/her way
to meet the needs of others.

For instance, we're free here at the Cathedral
to say anything we want in a meeting.
Yet I know people who sometimes

don't say what they are thinking in a meeting,
out of concern for the feelings
or limitations of someone else at the meeting.

Whether we talk of the way
we use our leisure time,
or our money,
or the way we use our God-given abilities
in the service of others,
people who join their lives
to the lives of others are those
who are truly free - free in Christ.

Martin Luther summarized these words of St. Paul about
freedom and slavery very well:

*“A Christian is the most free lord of all, and subject to none;
a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”*

Today we give thanks to Christ
For our slavery – and our freedom.