Year C- Homily for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time:

"What will we do with our freedom?"



Readings: 1 KGS 19:16B, 19-21; GAL 5:1, 13-18; Gospel: LK 9:51-62

In a few days we will be celebrating the 4th of July. So the idea of freedom will be on our minds and in our hearts.

In the film Braveheart, Wiliam Wallace leads a group of Scottish fighters who were seeking freedom from England. In his stirring speech before a major battle he asks his fighters, "What will you do without freedom?" That's a great question to ask when facing a loss of freedom. But, there is a greater question that we seldom ask "What will we do with freedom?" There are some freedoms that no

human being or government can take away. What will we do with the exercise of these freedoms?

Our readings from God's Word today present us with two understandings of freedom: Gospel freedom and worldly freedom. Worldly freedom is a freedom from any limitations. The second view of freedom is Gospel Freedom: it is not a freedom ***from*** limitations but a freedom ***for*** the flourishing of human life in communion with God and one another. (repeat)

The vision of Gospel freedom is not something you will hear proclaimed in the media or in our culture as a whole. Instead, from these sources, we mostly receive the lie of worldly freedom. This worldly freedom can be summed up in the statement: "You are free to do anything you want as long as you do not hurt anyone else." How many of you have heard that before?

Worldly freedom promises that you can drink as much as you want, take as much drugs as you want, play as many games as you want, seek as much entertainment as you want, have as many non-marital sexual experiences as you want, as long as you don't hurt anyone else. It seems every week we see the life of a celebrity or a person we know in our own community self-destruct or commit grave harm to another. Last month, after losing a video game, a father punched his 1-year-old son, killing him. Last week, another father fatally punched

his five-year-old son when the son was caught eating some of his Father's Day cake.

These were not tragic mistakes. These crimes were the result of buying into this vision, so deeply ingrained in our society, of a worldly freedom from all human limitations. We think the abuse of our own free will does not hurt anyone else but it ends up hurting and often killing either ourselves or another. As a society we no longer have an answer to the question: "What will you do with freedom?"

Now, let us look at our readings today. If you made a surface reading of our Gospel today, you might come away thinking that Jesus is in a bad mood. In so many other Gospel accounts Jesus compassionately heals people who are suffering and feeds people who are hungry. Today, Jesus encounters three would-be disciples on the road to Jerusalem and he replies with words to each of them that sound dismissive, blunt and harsh. So, what is going on here?

Each of these three people are still wrapped up in worldly freedom. In different ways they are seeking freedom from a limitation. Jesus is disturbing to them because he doesn't use his freedom to run from limitations or live in denial of them. He enters into them and suffers through them.

The first person desired freedom from the limitation of human discomfort and powerlessness. Jesus mentions foxes and birds having resting places, a reference to powers and comforts gained by King Herod and the Roman officials occupying Israel. Jesus says to the first person: if you follow me, you are entering more deeply into our human limitations of discomfort and powerlessness. Who here is drawn toward a life of comfort and likes to feel in control? Who here likes to avoid things that bring an inconvenience in your life? **What will we do with our freedom?**"

The second person Jesus actually invites to follow him, but he was enslaved to the worldly freedom from the limitation of time. He tells Jesus he needs to go first bury his father. It sounds like a legitimate request; but the wording here implies that the person's father is not dead yet. To follow Jesus is to recognize that our lifetime is limited; that God gives us our every breath and every heartbeat. Jesus calls this person now, not later. By answering Jesus' call, the second person would place his limited time in the hands of God and let God reveal what should take daily priority. But fearing the limitation of time, he asks to wait for his father to die and make sure all his affairs are in order before he follows. Who here likes to have their weekly schedule planned out and filled in, but usually leaves out times of prayer and service? Who here sometimes puts important things off and figures you will have time to get to it later? **What will we do with our freedom?**

The third person that Jesus meets tells Jesus he will follow him but he first wants to say good-bye to his family. He believes that by following Jesus his relationship with his family will become too limited. Jesus is calling this person to Gospel freedom that lives in the reality that the relationships with our biological family, while good, are limited. Our biological families is not where we stop providing relationship and support. The way of Jesus calls us to reach out beyond our blood relatives and be to our fellow human beings brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers. Who here spends time outside of Sunday getting to know other families in our parish and the people who live in our neighborhood? Who here tries to intentionally get to know people that don't share the same interests or are not the same, culturally or ethnically? **What will we do with our freedom?**

This call to go beyond biological family is also meant to stir the hearts of those of you here who may be called to a vocation as a priest or a religious sister or brother. Jesus invites some to give up the good vocation of marriage open to children, to seek a vocation that actually expands the call of fruitful family life. The call of these celibate vocations is a call to gospel freedom; to become a father, mother, brother or sister toward the larger body of Christ. Who here has sensed a call by God to be a priest or a religious brother or sister?

There is one person we have not talked about from our Gospel today and he is the most important one of all. Jesus. Jesus fully enters into all of our human limitations. He allows himself to be limited by time, by discomfort, by suffering, and by powerlessness. He even enters the greatest limit to human life, death. Yet, Jesus, by using his free will to enter into all these limitations is the most free, peaceful, joyful, and truthful man who has ever lived.

To follow Jesus is both a radical call but also the most fulfilling way to live life as a human being. To live a life of Gospel freedom means no longer living in denial of our human limitations, but living within these limitations to remain close to God and to serve one another through self-denying love. The way of Gospel freedom is the call to follow Christ on his way. It is the way of love but also the way of the cross. The way that seeks to sacrifice for and suffer with others instead of using another for one's own pleasure.

In just a few minutes Jesus will go even further than human limitation. At the words of consecration by the priest, Jesus limits himself and makes himself more helpless than a baby; either born or unborn. For on this altar, Jesus will be providing us with everything we need to live a life of Gospel freedom: Himself.

St. Francis of Assi understood Gospel freedom. He stripped himself of his whole family inheritance to live a life of poverty, chastity,

charity, and prayerful community. He understood Gospel freedom because he fell in love with Jesus in the Eucharist. He would spend more and more of his time with Jesus present in the Eucharist. St. Francis of Assisi in reflection on the Eucharist, exclaimed, *"O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that He hides Himself for our salvation under an ordinary piece of bread!"* This is God freely entering into limitation. To become food and drink for you and to wait for you to receive Him.

As we approach the fourth of July, I invite each of you to use your free will to grow in Gospel freedom and take a rest from the bombardment of worldly freedom you see played out each day in our world. Stop by a Catholic Church throughout the week to pray either on your own or with your family. Visit Jesus. Jesus desires to reveal to you what human life is like in communion with God and in loving service to others.

When you visit, He wants to ask you this question: "What will you do with your freedom?"