

14th Sunday in OT: Yr A – 2020 “July 4th Mass”

[Zec 9:9-10 · Rom 8:9, 11-13 · Mt 11:25-30]

We celebrate July 4th with fireworks, patriotic parades and backyard BBQ's. But don't lose sight of the true nature of this holiday – our nation was founded by throwing off tyranny. On July 4th, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was issued and declared our nation's independence from Great Britain. This document is our nation's most cherished symbol of liberty. Why? Because our independence from tyranny is based on our dependence on God who has created us with certain inalienable rights such as Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. To understand this better, we must examine why we have freedom.

First, freedom is our greatest God-given gift. God gave us free will to choose Him and his ways. God cannot force us to respond to his love. This is why marriage is proposed, not demanded. Without freedom, there can never be genuine love.

Second, freedom is conditioned by our relationships and responsibilities. We need each other, thus we live in relationship. Relationships of every kind, from business to family, presume commitment and self-sacrifice. Christians call this the virtue of love, or actively willing the best for the other. This “being in love” does not damage our freedom but enriches it. If we were free from others, then we would be lonely and unhappy. This is why Jesus referred to Heaven as the Father's house – we are like a family, working for a common good.

Third, freedom doesn't exist for the sake of freedom. In other words, we cannot hover over multiple options and never make a choice and commitment. There are two types of freedom: external and internal. External freedom is the absence of constraint or force, while the Bible is concerned with internal freedom or the ability to choose what is good and godly. In order to do that we have to give our freedom away to our pursuit of love and happiness. For example, a man gives up his freedom of dating other women and embraces marriage when he loves a particular woman. If we fail to give our freedom to something good, St. Paul tells us the result in our second reading: *“If you live according to the flesh, you will die.”* Hence, if we gave our freedom to overindulging in alcohol we become enslaved or addicted.

Lastly, the pursuit of absolute freedom ends up destroying freedom. Why? Because my rights end where your rights begin. Pursuing absolute freedom leads to violence and conflict and we both lose our freedom. Pope Francis said we must love God, neighbor and creation. An imbalance in any of these three relationships leads to a loss of freedom, conflict and suffering. This is why the closing words of the Declaration of Independence read, *“With a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence [or God], we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”*

The best use of our freedom is to build up God's presence on Earth. St. John was given a vision of this in the Book of Revelation. At the end of time, when God's kingdom comes and God's will is done, we will live in the New Jerusalem. Interestingly, this Heavenly city has no temple. Not because religion has been driven out, but rather because the city itself has become a Temple, where ever activity and every soul is dedicated to worshipping God. Pie in the sky dream? Maybe not, we have the freedom to usher in this type of city. For Pope Benedict asked, *“If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that he might take something away from us? . . . Do we not then risk ending up ... deprived of our freedom? . . . No! [...] If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing ... absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. [Therefore,] open wide the doors to Christ—and you will find true life.”*