

Thoughts from the Rectory ...

Dear friends of St. John the Evangelist,

As we gather today for Holy Mass and share in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice, we come to celebrate an authentic act of freedom. While our nation commemorates the declaration of our independence this fourth of July in the social, political, and historical order, we likewise participate each week in the great gift of our freedom won in Christ. It is a freedom from sin. Freedom from eternal death. Freedom to live. Freedom to hope. Freedom to be.

As we consider the great gift of freedom, as a nation and as individuals, I share with you some words from Pope St. John Paul II during his 1995 visit to Philadelphia and rejoice in the treasure that is our freedom.

I have mentioned the Declaration of Independence and the Liberty Bell, two monuments that exemplify the spirit of freedom on which this country was founded. Your attachment to liberty, to freedom, is part of your heritage. When the Liberty Bell rang for the first time in 1776, it was to announce the freedom of your nation, the beginning of the pursuit of a common destiny independent of any outside coercion. This principle of freedom is paramount in the political and social order, in relationships between the government and the people, and between individual and individual. However, man's life is also lived in another order of reality: in the order of his relationship to what is objectively true and morally good. Freedom thus acquires a deeper meaning when it is referred to the human person. It concerns in the first place the relation of man to himself. Every human person, endowed with reason, is free when he is the master of his own actions, when he is capable of choosing that good which is in conformity with reason, and therefore with his own human dignity.

Freedom can never tolerate an offense against the rights of others, and one of the fundamental rights of man is the right to worship God. In the [Declaration on Religious Freedom](#), the Second Vatican Council stated that the "demand for freedom in human

society chiefly regards the quest for the values proper to the human spirit. It regards, in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society ... Religious freedom, which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore it leaves untouched traditional Catholic teaching on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ" ([Dignitatis Humanae](#), 1).

6. Christ himself linked freedom with the knowledge of truth: "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8:32). In my first [Encyclical](#) I wrote in this regard: "These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning : the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world" ([Redemptor Hominis](#), 12).

Freedom can therefore never be construed without relation to the truth as revealed by Jesus Christ, and proposed by his Church, nor can it be seen as a pretext for moral anarchy, for every moral order must remain linked to truth. Saint Peter, in his first letter, says: "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom for malice" (*1 Pt* 2 :16). No freedom can exist when it goes against man in what he is, or against man in his relationship to others and to God.

Happy Fourth of July!

St. John the Evangelist, pray for us!

Fr. Pierz