

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

3rd Sunday of Lent | For Sunday, March 7 2021

Freedom in God's Commands

Written by Angie Windnagle

Exodus 20:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

John 2:13-25

Our heart is restless
until it rests in you.

St. Augustine



I was recently talking with my kids about why we choose as a family to eat mostly health foods and avoid more unhealthy junk foods when possible. It was a basic talk on cause and effect. When we eat junk food, we start to feel bad because our bodies need veggies and protein to grow big and strong. Something that came up was the concept of free will and human beings' ability to choose freely for themselves which path they will take. This led the conversation to the reality that while everyone is free to choose, one cannot choose the consequences of those choices. I am free to choose to run on ice, but the nature of ice and the laws of gravity will eventually catch up to me. I am free to touch a fire, but I am not free to choose whether it burns or not.

This concept seems fairly straightforward, yet in today's culture there is a skewed sense of freedom. We forget we are a redeemed people, rescued from the grips of death by a God who has literally chased us down to bring us back to him. This skewed sense of freedom leads to so many misunderstandings about the Ten Commandments. Are they just arbitrary rules from ancient times meant to make us feel bad? Are they still applicable today? Couldn't we bend them to speak to modern man? But in the readings today, if we read closely, we see a different message. A message of a Father who is madly in love with his children. By following God's commands, we experience the true freedom of children being cared for by their Father.

The first reading begins not with an admonition, but with a reminder of love: "I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery." Before the Commandments are given, God reminds His people that He is a God that is on their side. They were once living in oppression as slaves, but it was God who brought them freedom. It's

important to read the following verses in this context. God doesn't set out a long list of rules to control or harm His people, rather after bringing them freedom He shows them the way to stay within the boundaries of that freedom. The Ten Commandments are a love story of a God who wants to do everything possible to bring His people back to Him. He knows the weakness of humanity, and He guides us as a loving Father to the ways that will make us more human, the ways to live a morally upright life.

St. Paul describes this in the second reading when he says that "the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom." It doesn't make sense to our minds to accept boundaries as the road to freedom. Modern man seeks to fill the expanses of his heart by exposing himself to as much in this world as possible without realizing the things that lead him to sin shrink and narrow the heart. But even using a car to reach a far-off destination requires boundaries like the proper fuel and taking paved roads. Our hearts are made to image God. Freedom is only free if it makes us more like Christ.

In the Gospel Jesus teaches us the path to this freedom: through authentic worship at the new temple, his Body. As [Fr. Jacques Philippe](#) says in his book *Fire and Light*, "the Eucharist makes clear the degree of intimacy which God wants to draw us. In the Eucharist, the mad dream of all lovers is realized." Jesus stops the money changers not because he is losing control, but because the boundaries of his love free our hearts. Authentic worship and prayer are what will free us, not using our churches as places for commerce.

In this culture of faux freedoms, God is calling us back to Himself. We are free to choose to follow Him or not, but we are not free to choose the consequence of that choice. Only in choosing to follow Christ do our hearts find the answer to our deepest longings. As [St. Augustine](#) so famously said in his *Confessions*, "our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Angie Windnagle

PRAYER

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.
Amen.

-St. Augustine