

In today's Gospel, Jesus is back in his hometown at the synagogue in Nazareth to teach and preach. His first homily meets with rejection and anger. Before I get you mad at me, I'll address the *usual* question about this passage.

So who are all these brothers and sisters of Jesus, are they the children of Mary? If they were, then the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary would make no sense.

Gospels were written in Greek, and the word used could mean a sibling or what we would call a cousin. The meaning is determined by the context - and there is a clue in the context.

Two of these "brothers," James and Joseph, are identified later in Mark's Gospel - at the crucifixion - as the sons of another woman named Mary. Mark singles out three other women at the foot of the cross: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Salome. It becomes clear that the word brother has to mean something other than sibling because they are cousins of Jesus. In John's Gospel, this other Mary is identified as the sister of the virgin Mary, who is also the wife of Clopas, the uncle of Jesus. So James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon are the children of the woman Matthew calls "the other Mary" and Jesus' uncle Clopas.

Jesus himself tells us about the nature of this relationship - he refers to being "among his own kin." They're never called the sons of the Virgin Mary. If the context gives clues that they were children of a relative, then that's a reasonable interpretation of this passage.

My second point relates to the prophetic voice that all of us have because of our Baptism. In our first reading, God is commissioning Ezekiel to be a particular kind of prophet - one who gets rejected by preaching to a nation of rebels. This is not the prophet he wants to be, but this is the one he is called to be. I think this is also your call.

God is calling you to be a prophet. He is calling me. He is calling anyone who hears the truth of the Gospel. You have the task of bringing the word of God to a people who are going to reject it. A prophet hears and testifies to the truth, even when it's uncomfortable, even when it's unpopular, even when it results in, as Paul says in our second reading, "weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and constraints."

A prophet doesn't have to be smart or rich or ordained. A prophet has to listen to the truth. The truth we receive from Jesus, through the Gospel and the sacraments, is a great gift. But it's a gift that we are not meant to keep for ourselves. We are compelled by the Spirit to pass it on, to share it. We are often called to speak a word, or set an example for those around us, in our family, our social circle, or our local community.

Through God's grace and the sacraments, *we* see everything as signs of the mercy and love of the Father. This is the message you are called to preach to a nation quickly adopting wokeness. Wokeness forces you to see everything in society through a lens of power and oppression.

One of the reasons woke ideology has been successful at making inroads among Christians is that it feeds off the Christian precepts of compassion and aid for the marginalized and suffering. This leads to a lot of confusion among Christians. But on both a human and a spiritual level, wokeness is an ideology attempting to act like a religion - an ideology that harms far more than helps.

Borrowing the basics from Marxism, the woke break the world into groups of the oppressed and the oppressors. Activists proudly refer to themselves as Marxists, despite the millions of corpses that resulted from Marxism in action. Wokeness Incorporated has been poisoning young people for decades.

Since wokeness forces you to see everything in society through a lens of power and oppression, you have to undo everything. All Western thought, literature, institutions and ideas are systems of oppression that must be destabilized, disrupted and destroyed.

The woke movement is on a collision course with Christianity and Jesus is the ultimate target of the woke revolt. The spirit of this movement has at its core the very nature of the devil: it is chaotic and it is divisive. It corrupts Christianity by posing as a religion without justice, without mercy and ultimately, without Jesus.

The Catholic Christian practices of self-examination, confession, and repentance are no good. Catholicism is directed at reconciling everyone to God, whereas wokeness training is directed at making everyone conform to its ideology.

Wokeness is not cool and it's not new. It's based on Marxist principles from over 100 years ago. It's roots and history are based in atheism, and it seeks the destruction and dismantling of western culture by destroying and dismantling the family because the family upholds the dignity of a person.

So get mad, but I'm not done. Independence Day leads me to point out the interdependence of all the freedoms guaranteed by our founding documents and Christianity - my third point.

I think the founders of our country knew that the freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution and Bill of Rights would not lead to true happiness and human flourishing unless they were upheld and supported by Christianity.

Free markets with the rule of law provide the best social system ever devised, but Christian morality is required to keep this system in balance. The woke want to discard both free markets and the Christianity that maintains personal responsibility.

The current climate of wokeness tries to change our behavior by keeping the behavior of Christians, especially Catholic Christians, isolated from the public square - from workplaces and schools.

For now, the woke insist that you can privately believe what you want, you can privately worship as you want, but you can't bring any words or actions related to your faith into the public sphere. Even some current laws force Catholics to do things prohibited by Catholic moral teaching. The goal is to eliminate medical conscience rights and undo previously decided religious liberty cases.

And if that succeeds, freedom of religion would be reduced to a limited freedom of worship. We would have the right to believe whatever we want inside the walls of this church or inside the walls of our homes, but we would not be free to act consistently with those beliefs in the way we live our public lives. That would not be what I would call freedom.

So on Independence Day it's important to keep in mind that we all - regardless of politics, sexual orientation or race - we all have an essential stake in preserving freedom of religion, even when it offends the woke mob. Because once true freedom of religion is canceled, other freedoms will surely follow.

Amen?

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- Deacon Jack Schaefer