

Wednesday Reflection

Title: For Freedom

Date: February 15, 2026

ID: 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time (A cycle)

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-37; Short Form: 5:20-22a, 27-28, 33-34a, 37.

In this reflection, I use R. T. France. The Gospel of Matthew. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007. On the Commandments, see my book For Us and For Our Salvation (p. 51 and 52) All biblical quotations are from The New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABre).

Text: The first Christians were Jewish and considered Jesus as an extension of the law and prophets. St. Paul occasioned a dispute when he welcomed Gentiles: Must a Gentile Christian adhere to the Law of Moses? Matthew wrote for a Jewish-Christian community. Their ancestors' faith seemed under attack. Matthew's contribution quoted Jesus: "Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (5:15). The Sermon on the Mount asserts the law's fulfillment. Many have referred to this section as *antitheses*, which might suggest opposition to the law. Jesus quotes the law and then says, "But I say to you." Other scholars note that Jesus intensifies the law, which might communicate the law's inadequacy. The law says, "You shall not kill;" Jesus says, "Whoever is angry... is liable to judgement." Matthew prefers *fulfills* to both.

A meditation on freedom may advance the meaning of fulfillment. For many of us, freedom is the lack of coercion, including law. The biblical wisdom is different. When Moses presents the Commandments, he quotes God to introduce them: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). The Commandments establish of a free people. To live in freedom, a people must share norms and values. Try reading the Commandments as such norms (Exodus 20:1-17). The first Commandments are about God. Interpreting them through the introduction, they limit powerful people from using God to dominate others. Read them from the perspective of a people freed from hard labor meant to idolize Pharaoh (Exodus 20:3-7). How they must have felt when God commanded them never to bow down to an idol, or that no one could use God's name to force them to work, or that one day a week required total rest. Matthew's fulfillment of the law may be in the same vein as Paul's proclamation: "For freedom, Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1). Christ's freedom is not only freedom from coercion; it is freedom to aspire. Jesus teaches a new type of humanity; the new humanity enjoys aspirational freedom.

R. T. France offers four aspects of Matthew's fulfillment (p. 197). The first two insights have us searching for general principles to guide our behavior. Treating each person as a child of God, never using a person as an object, recognizing the dignity of others, valuing the agency of others: these are among those guiding principles. France's next two features help us appreciate aspirational freedom. Jesus teaches a demanding, positive goal of following the will of God. Jesus would have us aspire to the open-ended ideal of "being perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). What if we saw freedom as a divine vocation to become our best among other people aspiring to their best?