

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on For Freedom

Date: February 15, 2026

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

Scripture: Matthew 5: 17-37

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[: xx :] is a marker to remind myself to repeat the line inside the brackets.

Text: Some words have multiple meanings. The word freedom is such a word. Back when I taught college, the freshmen in my classes would define freedom as a lack of coercion, the ability to do whatever one wishes. No doubt their first semester away from home feels that way. Freedom in Scripture, however, is quite different.

An example of biblical freedom is the Ten Commandments. When Moses delivered the Commandments to Israel, he quoted God: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Most teachers skip that introduction. We might all be better, however, if our interpretation of the Ten Commandments began with that liberating introduction. A free people need to agree on values and norms so that they can interact in peace. Try reading the Ten Commandments as the norms needed to live together in harmony. A free people living together, for instance, need to trust each other. The Eighth Commandment demands truth. Without truth, trust erodes. Another example: Property rights need to be respected. We would not enjoy freedom if fear that someone is taking our stuff or invading our homes tied us down. The Seventh Commandment helps us sleep at night.

The first Commandments are about God. The introduction celebrating liberation is the key to their interpretation. Egypt considered Pharaoh a god. How liberating it must have been that Israel could worship only the One God of Abraham. The people of Israel did back-breaking work for the aggrandizement of Pharaoh. How wonderful was the law that says you shall never

bow down to an idol, a carving made to prop up Pharaoh's ego? I know the second Commandment on using the Lord's name has come to mean we cannot use bad words. But it was much more to a once-enslaved people—and should mean more to us. The second Commandment means that no one should use God's name to dominate others, to command another person, or to manipulate another. What a relief to a freed people who had worked long days every day in the NAME of a fake deity!

Biblical freedom is freedom with rules, values, and norms necessary for the peaceful interaction of people. The first commandments demonstrate that some people can misuse religion to dominate others. To be free, we need rules even for using God's name.

Jesus developed this same idea. To meditate on Christian freedom, St. Paul wrote these words: [：“For freedom, Christ has set you free.”:] Christian freedom means we are free to dream, hope, to imagine, to strive and create. We have freedom to construct our lives, to build families, construct homes and communities. Jesus offered us values and norms, rules, that allow us to imagine and dream of our best self. The Lord's freedom has no limits. Jesus said, “Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). What if freedom for a Christian means this: [:Freedom is the possibility to become my best self alongside others striving for their best selves.:]

This is crucial: To live in peace depends on my freedom ALONG WITH others being free to become their best selves. Jesus told us to love our enemies. Those not like me, who chose different lifestyles, even those who oppose me, they too must be free to build their own lives. When we treat each person as a child of God, then, together, we give witness to freedom.

When every child of God has the space to be themselves, to strive to become their best selves, everyone can live in peace.

Let's look at the Lord's examples. The Law of Moses said, "You shall not kill." Jesus said don't even get angry, don't insult, don't degrade, or abuse another person. When we do, we hurt the other person, yes, but—here's the Lord's great insight—anger degrades us. It rots our own souls.

The law forbids adultery. Jesus said you cannot lust after another. Lust changes the other into an object of desire. To make someone an object for our use reduces the value of the other, making them less than a free child of God. And it reduces the value of our own sexuality, our bodies, our God-given material selves.

Taking an oath implies that I cannot be trusted unless I call on a divine witness to my words. When we degrade the quality of our own speech, we degrade all interaction. Why not speak a simple truth, yes being yes and no being no.

Biblical freedom is the possibility of becoming our best selves alongside others becoming their best selves. Remember this: The Lord's freedom is without limits because Jesus invites us to be perfect as God is perfect.