

**Responsible Practice of Freedom -- US Catholic Catechism for Adults – pp 310-311**

The second element of life in Christ is the responsible practice of freedom. Without freedom, we cannot speak meaningfully about morality or moral responsibility. Human freedom is more than a capacity to choose between this and that. It is the God-given power to become who he created us to be and so to share eternal union with him. This happens when we consistently choose ways that are in harmony with God's plan. Christian morality and God's law are not arbitrary, but are specifically given to us for our happiness. God gave us intelligence and the capacity to act freely. Ultimately, human freedom lies in our free decision to say "yes" to God. In contrast, many people today understand human freedom merely as the ability to make a choice, with no objective norm or good as the goal.

An opposite tendency to one that makes the act of choosing the core of human freedom is one that denies that we are free at all. Some believe that due to outside forces, inner compulsions, social pressures, childhood experiences, or genetic makeup, our behavior is already determined and we are not truly free. Though we do recognize that "the imputability or responsibility for an action can be diminished or nullified by ignorance, duress, fear, and other psychological or social factors" (CCC, no. 1746), normally we are still free and responsible for our actions. Our freedom may be limited but it is real nonetheless.

The best way to grow in freedom is to perform good acts. Good deeds help to make us free and develop good habits. The road to loss of freedom is through evil acts. Sin makes us slaves of evil and reduces our capacity to be free. Freedom comes from being moral. Slavery to sin arises from being immoral.

**Saved in Hope (*Spe Salvi*) – Pope Benedict XVI – Paragraph 24 a and b****The true shape of Christian hope**

24. Let us ask once again: what may we hope? And what may we not hope? First of all, we must acknowledge that incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere. Here, amid our growing knowledge of the structure of matter and in the light of ever more advanced inventions, we clearly see continuous progress towards an ever greater mastery of nature. Yet in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man's freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others—if that were the case, we would no longer be free. Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning. Naturally, new generations can build on the knowledge and experience of those who went before, and they can draw upon the moral treasury of the whole of humanity. But they can also reject it, because it can never be self-evident in the same way as material inventions. The moral treasury of humanity is not readily at hand like tools that we use; it is present as an appeal to freedom and a possibility for it. This, however, means that:

a) The right state of human affairs, the moral well-being of the world can never be guaranteed simply through structures alone, however good they are. Such structures are not only important, but necessary; yet they cannot and must not marginalize human freedom. Even the best structures function only when the community is animated by convictions capable of motivating people to assent freely to the social order. Freedom requires conviction; conviction does not exist on its own, but must always be gained anew by the community.

b) Since man always remains free and since his freedom is always fragile, the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world. Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last for ever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom. Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good. Free assent to the good never exists simply by itself. If there were structures which could irrevocably guarantee a determined—good—state of the world, man's freedom would be denied, and hence they would not be good structures at all.

## **Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People – Vatican II – (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) – Paragraph 4**

4. Since Christ, sent by the Father, is the source and origin of the whole apostolate of the Church, the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord's words, "He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy. These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while correctly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate union with Christ from their life but rather performing their work according to God's will they grow in that union. In this way the laity must make progress in holiness in a happy and ready spirit, trying prudently and patiently to overcome difficulties. Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be irrelevant to their spiritual life, in keeping with the words of the Apostle, "What-ever you do in word or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17).

Such a life requires a continual exercise of faith, hope, and charity. Only by the light of faith and by meditation on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God in Whom "we live, and move, and have our being" ( Acts 17:28), seek His will in every event, see Christ in everyone whether he be a relative or a stranger, and make correct judgments about the true meaning and value of temporal things both in themselves and in their relation to man's final goal.

They who have this faith live in the hope of the revelation of the sons of God and keep in mind the cross and resurrection of the Lord. In the pilgrimage of this life, hidden with Christ in God and free from enslavement to wealth, they aspire to those riches which remain forever and generously dedicate themselves wholly to the advancement of the kingdom of God and to the reform and improvement of the temporal order in a Christian spirit. Among the trials of this life they find strength in hope, convinced that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Impelled by divine charity, they do good to all men, especially to those of the household of the faith (cf. Gal. 6:10), laying aside "all malice and all deceit and pretense, and envy, and all slander" (1 Peter 2:1), and thereby they draw men to Christ. This charity of God, "which is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5), enables the laity really to express the spirit of the beatitudes in their lives. Following Jesus in His poverty, they are neither depressed by the lack of temporal goods nor inflated by their abundance; imitating Christ in His humility, they have no obsession for empty honors (cf. Gal. 5:26) but seek to please God rather than men, ever ready to leave all things for Christ's sake (cf. Luke 14:26) and to suffer persecution for justice sake (cf. Matt. 5:10), as they remember the words of the Lord, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24) . Promoting Christian friendship among themselves, they help one another in every need whatsoever.

This plan for the spiritual life of the laity should take its particular character from their married or family state or their single or widowed state, from their state of health, and from their professional and social activity. They should not cease to develop earnestly the qualities and talents bestowed on them in accord with these conditions of life, and they should make use of the gifts which they have received from the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the laity who have followed their vocation and have become members of one of the associations or institutes approved by the Church try faithfully to adopt the special characteristics of the spiritual life which are proper to them as well. They should also hold in high esteem professional skill, family and civic spirit, and the virtues relating to social customs, namely, honesty, justice, sincerity, kindness, and courage, without which no true Christian life can exist.

The perfect example of this type of spiritual and apostolic life is the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles, who while leading the life common to all here on earth, one filled with family concerns and labors, was always intimately united with her Son and in an entirely unique way cooperated in the work of the Savior. Having now been assumed into heaven, with her maternal charity she cares for these brothers of her Son who are still on their earthly pilgrimage and remain involved in dangers and difficulties until they are led into the happy fatherland. All should devoutly venerate her and commend their life and apostolate to her maternal care.

**Luke 1:39-45**

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the child leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

**F.U.N. Manual – Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, page 36 of 46**

**Article 12** Witnessing to the good yet to come and obligated to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.

We have already seen that one of the names Bonaventure gives God is “Good.” Blessed John Duns Scotus, a Franciscan theologian and philosopher of the late thirteenth century, gives us a very basic definition of God. For Scotus, “God is Love.” This article of our Rule calls us to be God-like. As God’s instruments here on earth, we are to prepare a welcomed place for those whom we encounter. In the Lord’s Prayer we pray, “Thy kingdom come.” Jesus tells us in the Gospels that the kingdom of God is in our midst. He also warns that we cannot serve both God and mammon. We are to put aside those issues, those possessions, those fears that keep us focused on our self so that we are better able to focus on the other. Here again, Bonaventure’s notion of *kenosis*<sup>1</sup> as self-giving comes to the fore.

**REFLECTION**

- What holds you bound?
- What must you do to set yourself free?
- How do you witness in your own space to the goodness of God in our world?

<sup>1</sup> In Christian theology, kenosis (Greek: *κένωσις*, *kénōsis*, lit. [the act of emptying]) is the 'self-emptying' of Jesus' own will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.