

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 3, 2025

We enjoy so many more freedoms than any other place in the world. I am talking about personal freedom. What does it mean to have the ability to make our own decisions, our own choices? What do we do with this? Because the culture is telling us something very powerful about our freedom.

About 100 years ago in France, just outside of Paris, there was a young philosopher who developed a theory. And his theory was this: "That my radical freedom as an individual comes before who I am." And he said it this way: "Existence, my existence, my freedom, my existence, precedes my essence." My existence, my freedom comes before my identity, what is meant by this, in his philosophy, in the book that he wrote, is that "I determine what I become; I am so radically free, that is one thing over my existence about being a human being, I am so radically free that I determine who I become. I create my own identity. Who are you to tell me what I should do and what I shouldn't do? I get to decide that. There is no one that's going to tell me how to live my life. I determine how I am going to live my life and who I am going to become in the process." And that radical philosophy was developed by a man by the name of Jean Paul Sarte.

And that philosophy, friends, has become the dominant influence in our culture. Do you know what he said was an obstacle to his philosophy of radical freedom? Existence precedes essence. I determine my own identity. I determine who I am going to become. Do you know who he said was the greatest obstacle? It wasn't the state. It wasn't a political establishment, and it wasn't even the Church. It was God Himself. God was the primary obstacle to living out my freedom. Because he said, "If God exists, I can't be free. But I am free, so therefore God doesn't exist." That is how he reasoned

things. By the way, if you haven't figured it out by now, he was really wrong.

But I illustrate this point because the philosophy that underpins pretty much all of Western culture these days has become the main way of thinking, especially in younger generations, and we see crop up in the last five to ten years, especially with all of the identity movements. "I identify as a cat, and so you treat me as a cat because I have determined that's who I am." Or "I am a boy, and I have determined that I am a girl; or I am a girl and have determined I am a boy." I dictate my own identity. I am able to decide who I am. What I decide is what I become." That's a direct line from Sartre.

So, what does Scripture say? What does the Biblical world view say about our freedom. We are free, for sure. But God has chosen us first. We haven't chosen our own identity first. He's chosen us. At a certain point in time, He has willed you into existence. At the very moment of your conception, He created your soul, an immaterial soul that cannot be created through natural biology. God intervened in your creation, and He keeps you in existence. Did you realize that if God for one single second, a split second, were to stop thinking about you, you cease to exist.

So, think about this. What keeps all of us alive? The laws of biology, right? What keeps the laws of biology working? All the laws of chemistry. What keeps the laws of chemistry working? The laws of physics. What keeps the laws of physics working? We have pretty much reached the bottom end of it. That's when we call God. God holds all of this up. And even if we were to discover some other layer of reality that keeps the laws of physics working, it cannot go on forever.

So, in philosophy we say you cannot have an infinitely regression. An infinite cause of things without a first cause, otherwise, nothing exists. You have to have a first cause at some point, and we call that ‘Person’ the Three Persons. We call that which keeps everything else in existence – keeps the laws of physics in existence, which keeps the laws of chemistry in existence, which keeps the laws of biology, which keeps you in existence. That is done by God. So, if He were to stop thinking about you, if you were to figuratively take His hands away, you would cease to exist. That is how much God knows you.

He's always with you. He's chosen you first and has given you an identity. You are His beloved sons and daughters. You are his beloved children. We are His beloved children. That's our identity, and He has given us freedom with this identity to use. And here is the key because Sarte would say our freedom is freedom from anything that can possess us. Freedom from anything that might infringe on our freedom. “Freedom from” is what Sarte would say, and we would say, ‘Freedom for.’ God has given us freedom so that we will make decisions that lead us to live a life the way He wants us to live and therefore find happiness.

So, our freedom is meant to be used for something: Toward the salvation of our soul. For Heaven. For walking on a path through this life that leads us home to Heaven. That is what freedom is meant to be used for, and God gives us boundaries, and He gives us rules – the Ten Commandments. He gives us the Church as a good Mother, not as a bad Mother, but as a good mother, to help us choose well.

I leave you with this image. GK Chesterton wrote a famous book called *Orthodoxy* and, in his book, he gave an image to really reinforce this point about God, and about why He gives us the

Commandments, why He gives us a law, why He gives us miracles. GK Chesterton said that there was an island out in the middle of the rough seas, out of the middle of the ocean, raging seas all around this island, and on the side is a big hill, and on the top of this hill was a grassy knoll. There was a wall that surrounded it. Surrounded the grassy knoll. And on the grassy knoll were a group of children, and they were playing, and they were having great times, and they were running around and throwing the ball and being free as children are free, right? So, one day, somebody came and said, "Why are you putting a wall around these children? That is so oppressive. Tear down that wall!" And they tore down the wall. And a short while later, they came back, and they found all the children huddled in the center of the grassy knoll out of fear for being able to run freely and fall over the side of the hill.

The idea, friends, is that God gives us boundaries – He builds a wall saying this is how I want human beings to act. Don't steal, don't lie. Don't covet, don't kill, etcetera. Worship your Creator, this is the way I want you to witness, and this is the wall I give you. And within that boundary, play! Be completely free, be yourself, and you are free to do whatever you want within these boundaries. And these boundaries are there to keep you safe.

So, friends, I have all of this with you because it actually is related to our readings, not just today, but everything in the Gospels. If we get this point right, and we realize, hey, I am meant for something. I have freedom. Yeah, I can say, I am free to choose whatever I want in my life. But you are meant to use this gift for something wonderful, and that is to live a life where we are chained toward Heaven, and we are walking toward Heaven. And we are meant to use these gifts that we have of our identity as God's beloved children. The gift of freedom that we have to choose well that leads to happiness - for one thing

friends and for one thing only - so that you make it home. That's it. So that we make it home and there everything will be fixed. We will have eternal happiness and all of this, these difficult years of that we have experienced so many of us have experienced will be just distant memories.

Friends, that is where our treasure is meant to be, and our sights, the sight of our mind and the sight of our heart, is meant to focus on, not just when we come to Mass, not just when we're here praying, but every single day of our lives. Make God your primary focus, use your freedom well, and all will fall into place.