

## HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?

We are living in the midst of a very historical happening: the people of many of the Arab totalitarian nations are demanding their freedom. From North Africa to the Arabian Peninsula to the Middle East, millions of people are protesting to gain political, social, and economic freedom. We are witnessing history in the making. The most recent focus has been and remains on Egypt. Will the military hold free elections? Will the rights of all citizens, including women and Coptic Christians, be respected? Will they have freedom of speech, the right to assemble, freedom to practice their religion, and the like. Or, will they, like Iran, succumb to radical Islamic clerics and Sharia Law? Will they use their freedom **“to indulge the sinful nature (or) to serve one another in love?”** How will they use their freedom? What do you think?

But the real question for you and me today is not, “How will the Egyptians use their freedom?” Rather the big question is, “HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?”

Sadly, some people used their freedoms as an opportunity for sin. Consider Bernie Madoff who used his freedom to swindle and cheat investors out of billions. Huge Heffner used his to create a multimillion dollar sex empire. Many people see freedom as the opportunity to ignore, defy, and break the Commandments. How are you using modern technology and the Internet? Consider your cell phone or I-phone: you are free to make calls and text decent messages, or to share sexual messages and pictures that would make your grandmother blush? Take the internet: you use it gain knowledge, information and communicate with others, or you can surf for porn, snoop on neighbors, post insults, and spread nasty things about others or betray secrets? Some to use their freedoms to help others and make life better, others use them to scam others. Some use their freedom of speech to build others up, others to tear down. HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?

In our text St. Paul urges us, **“(But) do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature,; rather, serve one another in love!”** Let us all understand two important features in Paul’s use of the word “*freedom*.” **First**, the sense of the word means “*liberty: freedom with responsibility*.” **Second**, this freedom sets us free from the power of sin and satan, and the fear of death. We are freed to no longer be subject to the power and controls of sin.

Once we were enslaved to sin. Sin said, “Jump!” and we only asked, “How high?” And we jumped! In that enslavement satan tempted and persuaded us to be reckless, selfish, and to lie. He easily got us to be abusive, promiscuous, violent, slanderous, spiteful, and divisive. We used filthy language, hurt people, ignored God, closed our eyes to the needy and suffering, and we took advantage of others at the drop of a pin. That is what life is like under sin: breaking God’s laws becomes the normal way of life. Others are merely a means to our success.

But thanks be to God, we can be set free from sin and satan! And the Good News is that it has already happened! Jesus, Jesus did it for us! Jesus freed us when “*He suffered under Pontius Pilate*” and was brutally tortured. Jesus freed us when He was crucified on the Cross. Jesus freed us when He suffered our penalty for our sins. Jesus freed us when He shed His innocent blood and paid the price we owed with His own life. Praise the LORD! Jesus has set us free. He did it **ALL** for us. There is nothing more for us to do. Jesus freed us for a purpose! We are free to choose to follow God; free to choose to love and care for others; free to do the right things, say the right words, and live the right way. We no longer have to live for our sinful urges and desires. **HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?**

In a way, having freedom can be like suddenly having a huge sum of money. It can be a blessing if you use it wisely, or it can be a curse if it is not managed and used properly.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Matthew 5:38-48, which is taken from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, our LORD talks about the way of life for those who are controlled by sin and satan. They seek revenge and “**an eye for an eye.**” They will be nice to their friends, but will neglect and hate their enemies. They discriminate and treat others with prejudice. If you wonder why there has been almost four thousand years of hostility in the Middle East between the descendants of Isaac (the Jews) and the descendants of Ishmael (the Arabs), now you know! They have been the life controlled by sin. But when one is freed from sin through faith in Jesus, he begins to use his freedom to control the urge for revenge. He seeks to serve and assist others. One changes his view of his enemies from hostility and payback to praying for his enemies and showing them true Christ-like love and compassion. Jesus shows us how the proper use of freedom can change our hearts and our relationships with others. **HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?**

There are three things we can do that will help us use our freedoms in a God-pleasing way. **First**, when you come to worship, make it a priority to “gladly hear and learn the Word of God.” Listen as God speaks to you in the music, in the

readings, in the sermon, and in the Sacrament. Let God guide you as you live a life of freedom. **Second**, search the Scriptures, study the Bible. Understand the life Jesus has freed you to live. Learn where to find the power to **“use your freedom...to serve one another in love rather than indulge the sinful nature.”** Comprehend the new life of freedom that Jesus won for you. And **third**, before you act, ask yourself, “What would Jesus do?” and then proceed. As the great American frontiersman Davy Crockett once said, “Be sure you’re right and then go ahead.” When you walk with Jesus and follow His Word, you will be right! **HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?**

You have to make a choice when it comes to using your freedom. What is that choice? You can use your freedom to be free like Jesus. Like Jesus, you can live in a God pleasing way that will help others, show kindness and love, give and forgive, express compassion and empathy, encourage and lift up. Or, you can use your freedom to indulge in selfish, sinful pleasures that will separate you further from your Creator and Savior, and your fellow man. It is your choice! **HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?**

And I will let you in on another truth. When you use your freedom to be like Jesus, when Jesus frees you from sin and satan, you will free to use your political, social, and economic freedoms in a way that will glorify and please God, and serve and benefit others.

I don’t know what the people of Bahrain, Tunisia, Libya, Jordon, Yemen, and Egypt will do with their freedom. Without Jesus in one’s heart it is hard to predict. But when Jesus rules one’s heart and life, he will strive to use his freedom **“to serve one another in love.”** My friends, Jesus has set us free. He sends His Spirit to us through the Word and Sacraments to energize our lives to use our freedom to the glory of God. Let us not become re-enslaved by sin and satan. As you live your life, **HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM?** May it be to the glory of God and in service to others! IJN, amen.