

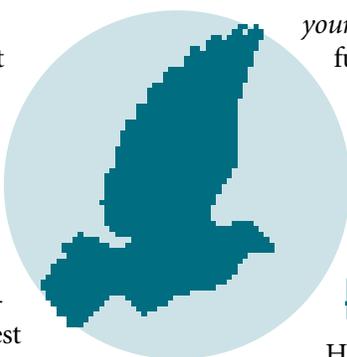
Freedom for Others

BY MARY BETH NEWKUMET

Here in America, freedom is the defining value of our culture, yet many of us do not fully understand or appreciate its meaning. You see this underestimation of freedom in the American cultural portrayal of the “free spirits” who chart their own course, often rejecting the seemingly captive lives of marriage, kids and jobs being led by the rest of us. The media tells the stories of these people wrapped in a certain aura of romance and awe. Wouldn’t it be cool, the stories imply, to have as much freedom as Ted Turner to help set the U.N. population control agenda, as much freedom as Hugh Hefner to entertain all of Hollywood in your pajamas, as much freedom as Madonna to explain to the kids what their parents won’t?

Wouldn’t it be cool to have so much cash, influence and power that you, too, could create your own guidelines for living? Because this is what “freedom” has become for many people: the ability to make up your own truth, and decide what is best for you personally.

Sadly, a culture based on moveable truths can seduce you into thinking that to be truly free you need to liberate yourself from the people and commitments that bog you down and keep you from being fully alive and therefore, truly happy. The consequences of this *freedom from others* are all around us as “free spirits” divorce, abandon, abort, Kevork, reject and dismiss the people whom they perceive are holding them down. Yet even after this, their hearts are not free. Enclosed within themselves, within their own version of truth, they are enslaved by the world. What can free them? Only a link with Someone infinite, an eternal truth *that is neither*



your version nor mine, only this One can fulfill their deepest desires for unending love, peace, happiness and true freedom. “I am the way and the truth and the life,” said Jesus of Nazareth. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32).

FREE FOR PATRICK

How does the truth of Jesus Christ set us free? Let me give you an example.

From all outside appearances, I, too, am living a fairly captive life. Although my older three kids are in school during the day, my toddler Patrick is home with me full-time keeping me from long quiet

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Mary, the first Steward of Christ

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hours, more income, bigger projects, lunches with friends and a decidedly better wardrobe! Many people would look at my situation and feel trapped. In fact, many parents do. Longing for escape, they feel caught inside the circle of their lives, put upon and unappreciated for the menial work they do on the job, in the house and the all-consuming time spent with the kids.

I will admit there are days when I feel this way, too, yet for the most part, I am happy and content. This has nothing to do with having a good attitude about my situation. Rather, deep in my heart, I know that there is more to my life than these four walls with this busy boy. Linked to Someone infinite, Someone not of this world, my spirit soars. My interior life with Christ provides true liberation to the perceived captivity of my days, leaving me peaceful and rich beyond all measure. And because of this fact, I can watch and serve my own “Baby Jesus” with genuine love and even occasional serenity as he trashes my home office, takes the phone off the hook and pours juice on the rug just because he likes the color.

FREE IN CHRIST

For every person living in “captivity,” a life with Christ proposes something radically new: true freedom is not freedom from others, but *freedom for them*. By fully embracing the people in our lives in the same way we embrace Christ, we are completely free because only the Lord takes our desires for love, truth and happiness seriously.

“All the sovereignty and freedom of the world compared with

the freedom and sovereignty of the Spirit of God is utter slavery, anguish, and captivity,” wrote St. John of the Cross. He should know. Imprisoned by his own Carmelite order in a cold, dank room only six feet wide and ten feet long, he was mistreated and kept from the sacraments for nine months. The only light he saw was a slit high up in the wall. Yet, according to a biographer, “his imprisonment brought about a transformation in Friar John and occasioned in him a great love of others, a deep understanding of and compassion for the sufferer, an uncommonly clear vision of the beauty of God’s creation, and an intimacy with the Blessed Trinity which he found describable only through comparison to the properties of the beatific vision.”

Sitting on the floor of his cell detached from all things, St. John experienced the mystical union with God that he had sought all his life. Thanks to a jailer who gave him pen and paper, we can still read his writings on the *Dark Night* and the *Ascent to Mount Carmel* that describe an encounter with a Someone outside of this world. To be fully free to experience this presence, he wrote, each person must go through the dark night, stripped of all the attachments of this world that keep him or her from the infinite God. Only after this encounter are we fully free enough to love and serve the people around us, no matter how captive our situation.

FREEDOM IS OFFERED BY THE CHURCH

“The multitude of men,” observed John Henry Newman, “are living without any aim beyond the visible scene.” Indeed,

any change in humanity that is truly new can only come from outside humanity itself, observes Msgr. Luigi Giusanni in his book, *The Religious Sense*. “Change must come from ‘Another’ who is radically different from humanity, and it comes in fact from the grace of the presence of Christ recognized and loved in Christ’s Church.”

Without a link to Christ, we will be enslaved by the power of

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Free Obedience

The paradox of Christianity is that to be fully free, to be fully human, we must be bound to Another and live a certain obedience. This is true no matter what vocation we freely choose: either marriage or consecrated celibacy. The One who shows us how to live this free, obedient life is Jesus Christ. He does this primarily in the Sacrifice of the Mass on Sunday as we celebrate one of God's greatest mysteries: that by obediently going to his death, as captive as a lamb to slaughter, Jesus was freely giving himself away in love to all mankind.

"There is no contradiction between obedience and freedom," writes Pope John Paul II. "Indeed, the Son's attitude discloses the mystery of human freedom as the path of obedience to the Father's will, and the mystery of obedience

as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom." At Mass on Sunday, we experience the ultimate act of obedience and freedom *for others* — Calvary.



A MORAL LIFE IN CHRIST

Obedience to the Church can be a stumbling block for many nominal believers. I think this is because they mistake a moral life in Christ with the moralism proclaimed by the world. There is a big difference.

Because of the life of the Church, and especially the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where we fully receive Jesus into ourselves, we are able to live moral lives. But it is Christ who brings us his morality, his obedience to the will of the Father. We can not do this on our own. This is why the "values" of moralism can not sustain the Lord's morals because they have no fixed reference point, no security in Someone beyond this world. Consequently, they become moveable and therefore, easily manipulated.

Free obedience to the life of the Church is only possible if we trust the One who knows us, loves us and has our best interests deep in his sacred heart. At Mass on Sunday, we do not gather together to celebrate our common values, however noble they may be. We gather to celebrate Jesus Christ

and link our lives to his; to offer him our hearts, our bodies, and our lives so that we might live, here and now, his divine freedom. This is the gift the Father gives to us in the sacramental life of the Church, a way to experience the radically free obedient life of his Son. When we embrace this freedom we ask the Father to "see and love in us what you see and love in Christ." (*Preface, Sunday in Ordinary Time, VII*) ❖

Getting There...

The Sacrament of Penance is the place where we allow the Lord to strip us of the sins that enslave us and keep us bound to the false freedoms of the world. In forgiveness, the person of Christ — through his priest — provides us once again with the freedom to experience a union with him that can continue to transform our lives and the lives of everyone around us. Do not allow your fear of this sacrament to enslave you. Experience radical freedom — visit Christ in the Confessional regularly. ❖

Freedom Prayer

"O my soul, set aside by grace, you are destined to be a partaker in the divine nature. Through this grace you are united to the Holy Trinity, not yet fully as in the life to come, but nonetheless even now in a real and perceptible way. O my soul, created to enjoy such exquisite gifts, what are you doing, where are you going? How wretched is the blindness of Adam's children, if indeed we are blind to such a brilliant light and deaf to so insistent a voice!"

— St. John of the Cross. (1542-1591). ❖



Living Free Love

BY JOHN M. CAPOBIANCO

The most powerful lure of hapless freedom in our American culture is the constant pursuit of sexual satisfaction or “free love.” Everywhere one turns SEX smacks one in the face, so to speak. After all, when the promise of sexual fulfillment is the main sales tool of our economy, what does one expect? To twist a phrase from a popular liturgical song, our sexually charged culture constantly urges us over and over to “Taste and See.”

IS SEX LIKE ITALIAN FOOD?

So when it comes to experiencing love and fulfilling our hearts, what do we taste? Sadly – if one dismisses the love of Christ and one merely nibbles (or even eagerly gobbles) the offerings of physical “free love” proposed by our culture – one is left, at best, with the fleeting taste of *twinkies*. Yet what does Christ offer? I think he dishes out something more like prosciutto & melon, homemade spaghetti, brasciole & meat balls, olive insalada, a thick hunk of bread and a thin slice of casacavale with a splash or two of vino, under soft music and candle light. And after you think you’ve had enough, he brings you a... cannoli. He is the perfect chef who knows and satisfies your deepest appetite. Yet, do we trust him? Do we want his food? The sad reality is – faced with this choice of what to taste – many of us (if the polls are accurate) continually desire and choose... the twinkies. In our effort to savor what the world offers, we choose to “see” the love of Christ as awfully repressive and



the sexual proposals of our present American culture as delightfully liberating. Ah, the impact of the sexual revolution remains blinding, doesn’t it?

Today Christ offers a vision of authentic “free love” that is anything but repressive. He confounds the cultural norm of thwarted relationships, halfhearted intimacy, confined passion and the pain and heartache of the “anytime, anywhere with anyone” mentality. He places before us and our families the real possibility of long lasting intense intimacy, a passion and love caught up in his divine life. It’s never too late to let him show you how to love this way, no matter where you are in life. Like a good Italian mother, he’s always cooking. His vision of human love surpasses mere rules or canned answers. It cannot be fully learned in a classroom, found alone on the street or watched in the movies (sorry Hollywood). It must be discovered, smelled, lived and nourished everyday in your home. Why? Because – according to John Paul II – sexuality is ultimately about an enduring gift, “the gift of self in love.” It involves your “whole per-

son: body, emotions and soul” given freely, totally and unconditionally to your spouse. Why give to only one person, holding nothing back? Because otherwise the gift would not be total, not be unconditional, not be caught up into his mind-blowing love with the Father. It would never satisfy our destiny or completely fill us. We would always hunger for more.

ASK HIM TO FEED YOUR FAMILY

Husbands and wives must give compelling evidence to one another everyday in family life of the depth, the truth, the meaning of their “gift of self in love.” This free gift expressed through the “language of the body,” is God’s way of sustaining his love on earth, building family life and love. In this way our love – through him – becomes embodied in our children. In him, this awesome “free love” lasts forever and never loses passion, even in the midst of tragic human failure, experiences and disappointments. He, the master chef, is the one who makes this family love possible. He is the one who will show you how to experience and live this love with your children, and your children’s children. Do you trust him? This is what life in the home is all about. Doesn’t it sound like a luscious Italian meal that just goes on and on? Just ask him to feed your family. *Mangia!* Just don’t expect him to listen real good when you scream “basta... basta... basta!” Remember, he knows your destiny and how to satisfy your deepest hunger. ❖

Depressing Freedom

The longing present in every heart for a full and free life that is worthy of the human person is particularly strong” in young people, says Pope John Paul II. Adolescence is when the first bursts of this longing become evident as our normally compliant children suddenly become new people. (“How dare they have minds of their own,” my husband always muses!) We see a longing for freedom in their dress, in their expression, in their attitude. Just as the Lord intended, our kids are trying to find their own destiny and be free to pursue a lush life of love, security, beauty and truth.

Often though, the desires that make their hearts soar are diminished by the proposals of the world. Around them, they see and often experience relationships that are shallow and sometimes demeaning. In the workplace they encounter situations where they are treated like numbers, like things, instead of people. Gradually, they see that the world does not take their desires seriously, causing them to feel trapped, depressed, and imprisoned. To escape, they fall into casually intimate relationships with no depth or commitment, or mindless leisure pursuits that focus on the self and not another. Deep within them is a sadness that their longings can never be fulfilled, that this life — often the world of the imperfect adults who surround them — is all there is. How depressing.

UNEXPRESSED ANGER

The depressed desires of young people — and their reaction to this depression — is manifested in their music, their art, their clothes

and their culture. “Most often our depression is unexpressed anger,” observes poet/author Kathleen Norris, “and it manifests itself as the sloth of disobedience, a refusal to keep up the daily practices that would keep us in good relationship to God and to each other. For when people allow anger to build up inside, they begin to perform daily tasks resentfully, focusing on others as the source of their troubles. Instead of looking inward to find the true reason for their sadness, they direct it outward, barreling through the world, impa-



tient and even brutal with those they encounter; especially those who are closest to them.”

Anyone like this in your house, classroom, or neighborhood? Unfortunately, there are far too many.

How does a parent, a pastor, a teacher or friend combat depression of freedom? By teaching kids how to *respond* to the longings of their hearts. Isn't responsibility, after all, learning to respond well to the people and situations around us? Only by responding fully to life in relationship with Christ will kids find all their longings for truth, freedom, love and peace fulfilled. Only by learning this “responsibility” to the lush life that the Lord offers will they escape the enslavement of a culture that offers depression in the place of freedom. — MBN ❖

Getting There...

“My high school years, in a nutshell, were the epitome of the reduction of desire. Freedom to me suddenly meant no parents, no rules, no classes, no religion. I became very reclusive, often locking myself in my room, shutting myself out from the world around me. I slept through a good part of the day, I think as a further escape from life. Finally, my parents saw that I was experiencing serious depression and realized my need to seek professional help.... I finally realized that if I wanted my life to change, if I wanted to know what it meant to be happy, to be satisfied, I would have to make that change for myself, and I would have to allow God back into my life. Without Christ, all of the peace I was looking for was imagined. There was absolutely no hope for reality because I was living in a dream world....It took me six years, and I still have a ways to go, and although these have seemed to be the longest six years of my life, I survived. But not only did I survive, I learned how to really live. And I no longer need to imagine life without a purpose, nor do I want to imagine life without religion, like John Lennon sings about, because freeing ourselves from the good things in life, like God and family, and responsibility, really is not freeing ourselves at all; it is building a wall around us, like a prison.” — Part of a talk given at a parish “Freedom Retreat” by Lisa-Marie Sparacino, a college student from Maryland. ❖

Freedom for the Lord



To the secular world — and even to many parishioners — the life of a consecrated person can seem like a waste. This is especially true of priests, nuns, brothers and consecrated women who seem like they would make great husbands and wives. Why, many people wonder, have these wonderful people chosen a life of celibacy and obedience to the Church? Doesn't this life that seems so constrained diminish their freedom and keep them from pursuing lives that are far more passionate and interesting?

In his 1996 exhortation on the consecrated life, Pope John Paul II reminds us of the story of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who was accused of “wasting” a pound of precious nard on Jesus (Jn 12:3-7). Her extravagance, says

the Pope, was an outpouring of the heart, of “unbounded generosity.” Her act had nothing to do with being practical in the eyes of the world. Instead, she gave everything to Christ with an “undivided heart.” In response to the criticism of Judas about the waste, Jesus tells him to “leave her alone!”

A NUPTIAL GIVING

Like Mary, the one who “chose the better part,” (Lk 10:42) consecrated persons freely choose to live a life of love completely for Christ. They have such a sense of the Lord as Someone they know, that their whole lives become a complete self-donation, the act of a lover. “The choice of virginity or celibacy for one’s whole life, has become in the experience of Christ’s disciples and followers the act of a particular response of love for the divine Spouse,” says the Pope in the *Theology of the Body*.

“Therefore, it has acquired the significance of an act of nuptial love, that is, a nuptial giving of oneself for the purpose of reciprocating in a particular way the nuptial love of the Redeemer. It is a giving of oneself understood as renunciation, but made above all out of love.”

The mystical union with Christ that dwells in the heart of each consecrated life enables that person to be bound in the obedience of celibacy, fixed community and/or parish life — yet completely free — to give that love away to other people. Therefore, the consecrated person can be a true “Father,” “Mother,” “Sister” or

“Brother” to the people whom he or she is called to serve with love.

In parish life, it is good for parishioners to remember that just as the harried father of a demanding brood needs to sit quietly with his wife on occasion and recall the love that started this family life in the first place, so too, priests, nuns and other consecrated persons in parish life need the same time and recollection to keep their relationship with Christ strong. Pray for them; encourage them. Ask the Holy Spirit to fan the flame of their love to ensure that it keeps burning brightly for all to see. ❖

Getting There...

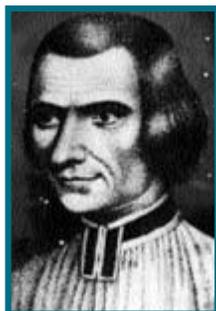
Perhaps one of the roadblocks to vocations these days is the way that the consecrated life is presented to young people. Do they see the life of consecrated religious as a life of pure love or as a life of pure sacrifice, constraint and duty? Introduce children to members of the clergy and religious communities who are “in love” with Jesus Christ. Seek these people out; invite them to dinner; bring them into your community to talk to young people. How will you know them? Their passion for the Lord will be contagious. — MBN ❖

A Free Choice

As a former university professor, St. Edith Stein was not only fairly inept at the daily chores required at the Carmelite convent where she lived before her death in 1942, but also confessed to having “a hard time learning all the little rules” of the Order. And yet, despite the dramatic change — freely made — from renowned intellectual to floor mopper, Edith was peaceful and deeply happy. She wrote once to another nun, “charity demands that we adapt ourselves to the customs of the house and the tastes of the community. If we do it to gladden the heart of Jesus, it will not be a constraint for us, but rather the exercise of freedom in what is more noble, a voluntary act of love toward our Bridegroom.” ❖

A New Liberation

We all know people experiencing hapless freedom in our families, workplaces, and the world community. Because they do not rely on the Lord to help them — because they have no sense of who he is — they seek remedies for all their afflictions within *this* world. They try to work out the possibilities themselves within a dimension that enslaves them, giving away all their “rights” to those who hold the power. Observed St. John Vianney, “those who love themselves with a love that seeks themselves and the world — that seeks creatures more than God — are never satisfied — never quiet. They are always uneasy, always tormented, always upset.” Because they have no God, they have no peace.



St. John Vianney

With our hapless “freedom” culture beamed all over the world, many different peoples have a canned view of American

freedom. They see us in our sitcoms and movies with our wealthy lifestyles, casual relationships and free enterprise that provides much for some and none for others. The view they get of our “free lives” is often distorted and false. Yet our influence on them is enormous. As Catholics from America, how can we show the world a new vision of freedom that is *for others*, and not the self-satisfied cowboy all alone on the range?

The Stewardship of Freedom

A new vision of freedom for America can only be authentic if we lead the way in self-giving and charity to other peoples of the world. The Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood Association, and other Catholic missionary organizations based in the United States send missionaries, funds, and goods to serve people in other nations who are enslaved by poverty, oppression and suffering. Support these missionary arms of the Church with your time, talent and treasure. Bring the freedom of Christ to the world. ❖

WE ARE POINTS OF ENTRY

As “points of entry” in which the Lord can show the world himself, it is up to us to show the world a new experience of freedom. Do we show the people we know and work with how our life with Christ provides us with liberation from the oppressive powers of the world? Because without the experience of an utterly dependent relationship with the Lord, all of us are simply at the mercy of those with the most money, the most guns and the most power. These are the people who will define “our rights.”

As members of his Body, the Church, it is our mission in the world “to direct man’s gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all men to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption taking place in Jesus Christ,” says Pope John Paul II (*Redeemer of Man*). Only Jesus can set us free.❖

Our Freedom Pope

As a child of World War II and the Communist regime, Pope John Paul II has experienced many versions of freedom and captivity in his life. These are constant themes in his many deeply felt writings to the people of God: “Different philosophical systems have lured people into believing that they are their own absolute master, able to decide their own destiny and future in complete autonomy, trusting only in themselves and their own powers. But this can never be the grandeur of the human being, who can find fulfillment only in choosing to enter the truth, to make a home under the shade of Wisdom and dwell there. Only within this horizon of truth will people understand their freedom in its fullness and their call to know and love God as the supreme realization of their true self.” (Faith & Reason) ❖

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you experience freedom “for others” or “from others”? (p. 1 and 2)

- What worldly things and desires enslave you?
- How can the truth about Jesus Christ set you free?

Do you trust in the Lord enough to participate in his mystery of obedience? (p. 3)

- What is the difference between the moralism of the world and a moral life in Christ?
- Do you experience the freedom of the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly?

Do you really believe that Jesus Christ is the path to “free love”? (p. 4)

- Give examples of the lies prevalent in popular culture with regard to “free love.”
- Do you consider your sexuality as something involving not just your body, but also your mind, heart and soul?

Describe your longing for freedom as a young person. (p. 5)

- How do the culture’s proposals for freedom ultimately lead young people to feel trapped and depressed?
- How can we show young people who are attracted to the culture’s “freedoms” that Christ is the only one who takes their desires seriously?

Why does freedom for the Lord strike so many as a reduction of human freedom? (p. 6)

- What are some ways you can personally encourage those around you in religious life to rediscover the beauty of their vocations?
- Do you exercise your freedom by doing many little offerings of love for the Lord alone?

How can you propose the Lord’s freedom in your world? (p. 7)

- How do we bring freedom to those who are enslaved by oppression and suffering?
- Do you see how you can be Christ’s “point of entry” for the liberation of the world?

Freedom for Others

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the world: by history, biology, the state, our circumstances, our anxieties and fears. Only an encounter with Someone infinite beyond this world can transform us and set us free. And how do we encounter the infinite? Through the person of Jesus Christ in his Body, the Church, through the Word, the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) and the community of believers. This is the only One who can make us truly free. Why? Because Christ is the only unchangeable fixed point, the only connection between us and the mystery beyond this world.

A link to the living presence of Christ through the life of the Church, agrees Msgr. Giusanni, “allows me to proclaim that the world can do what it wants with me, but it cannot conquer, possess, grasp on to me, because I am greater than it is. I am *free*.” With this new vision of Christian freedom, all of us are called to set others free by offering them our friendship, our love and bringing them his freedom for others. For me, this means freedom to be home and at peace with my whirlwind boy, and to love him and the rest of my family and friends with a boundless love that only comes from a relationship with Christ. ❖

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From the Monsignor.....

How Can Anyone Be Free?

In this life, we are at the mercy of power: the power of history, the power of peers, the power of biology, the politics of economics and of religious worries. If our lives are defined by those powers, we are not free. The only way we could possibly be free is if we are routed and linked to a reality that is higher than these forces. Otherwise we are just one, little anonymous point in the large, blind march of history that leads nowhere, or even worse — to chaos — so you’re not really free. People realize this and that’s why they thirst for the infinite and for God and what they call God. But, can we really have that link with the infinite beyond the powers of this world? As Catholics, we claim, yes, and that link has a face, a human reality, its human nature is called Jesus Christ. God is linked to us only through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our link with infinity so therefore we are free if we are united with Christ. More concretely, our identity as free is defined by him, by this relationship, by this knowledge of love he has for us. The alternative is to be caught in the power of the world. If freedom is not defined by him and by this relationship, by belonging to him, then it is defined by other powers. How does this linking and this belonging take place with Christ today? It takes place in the community that is his Body, the Church. That is the fact of his liberating presence in my world, in my history. When I belong to that people I belong to Christ, I belong to God, and I am free. If not, I belong to power. ❖

— Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete,
U.S. Ecclesiastical Advisor for Communion and Liberation, an international movement in the Church