**13th Sunday C June 26, 2022 Dcn. Frank Olmsted**

**I Kings 19.16b, 19-21 Galatians 5.1, 13-18 Luke 9.51-6**

**St. Cletus Parish 5:30 pm and 7:30 am masses**

 **The Letter to the Galatians is often called the Magna Carta of Christian liberty. Paul used this letter to delve again into the question of whether a Gentile wanting to become a Christian, must first become a Jew. Some Christian teachers in 1st century Asia Minor believed you had to convert to Judaism before being baptized into Christ. They argued a Christian had to observe all the tenets of the Mosaic Law as well as follow the teachings of Jesus. The crisis was so serious twenty years after the resurrection of Jesus, that Paul had to tackle this, and tackle it now! The central portion of his letter is about justification by faith alone, that is that salvation and eternal life are gifts from God. We cannot earn them by racking up points for the good we do or through the Laws we’ve followed. We can accept the gifts from God, embrace them fully in faith, and then live in accordance with them by following the teachings and morality of Jesus. St. Paul wrote, “You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, but do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, rather serve one another through love.” Here he takes us to a fundamental difference between two types of freedom. First there is “the freedom from.” This is freedom from restraint and coercion. This is what most people mean when the say they want to be free. They want the freedom to do what they want without anybody putting limitations or responsibilities on them. I want to do what I want, when I want, in whatever way I want to, and often without concern for what my actions might mean in terms of others’ welfare or betterment. I don’t want religious leaders, political leaders, ethicists or moral theologians telling me what I should or should not do. Obviously, this type of freedom to do what I want doesn’t work out well by itself. The freedom one person wants may encroach on someone else’s freedom. It may harm or even take the life of another. We see this battle over the freedom to do whatever we want played out in extreme forms today. We don’t want this unborn child so we will terminate his or her life and no one should prevent us from doing it. I want to own military style rifles with large magazines and no one should put any constraints on that. We should be able to start our child on gender altering drug therapies because we decided we want a boy and not the girl we were given. Those are radical forms of the “freedom from” any kind of restraint or coercion. I want what I want and that’s it! We all want to exercise that type of freedom in smaller ways to get the things we want and do the things we want to do.**

 **St. Paul spoke of the other type of freedom, the “freedom to.” This means having the freedom to listen, the freedom to seek knowledge and wisdom, the freedom to grow and to choose the good and the true, the freedom to seek God, the freedom to serve others, and the freedom to share the faith. Paul said this type of freedom is not about “opportunities for the flesh,” or doing whatever I want for my own advantage or gratification, but about “serving others in love,” with the care and concern for their ultimate good as our priority.**

 **Jesus addressed this in the gospel when he called a man to follow him, but the man said, “Lord, let me go first and bury my father,” to which Jesus responded, “Let the dead bury their dead.” The would-be follower possibly meant, “I’ll join you after my parents have passed away.” Jesus said, “I’m calling you to the freedom to come into the Kingdom of God and work toward making it visible in the world right now, not twenty or thirty years from now.”**

 **I went to college with a guy who was confronted with the two types of freedom from the first day he arrived on campus as we all were. His parents gave him the opportunity to participate in the “freedom to” by sending him to a very good private Catholic college. He was given the freedom to study and learn, the freedom be a part of good things the college offered like liturgies, retreats, St. Vincent de Paul Society, discussions about literature or philosophy at professors’ homes, the freedom to tutor students, etc. There was also at college a lot of the “freedom from” as well: the freedom from dad and mom watching his daily moves, the freedom from teachers staying on his case all the time as they had in high school, the freedom from the pressure of reaching higher to always try to do more, and the freedom from previous restraints he might have had at home against engaging in immoral and unhealthy behaviors. This fellow opted for the “freedom from” rather than the “freedom to.” He decided that this college thing had the possibility of being fun with only minimal effort and responsibility if he played his cards right. He chose what he perceived to be the easiest major, did just enough to get C’s, did not participate in any religious, civic, service, or extra-educational activities, drank more than ample amounts of beer, played a lot of games, watched a lot of television, and slept till noon as often as possible. At the end of four years Bob received a BA with a 2.05 grade point, barely enough to graduate, with 124 credit hours, the absolute minimum to get a degree, and he was proud of how he squeezed by. Imagine what he might have done had he chosen St. Paul’s “freedom to” instead. Imagine how much more he could have gotten from his college experience. Imagine how much better he might have been prepared to go out and do something positive in the world that would make other’s lives better. Our society gives us perhaps more “freedoms from” than most other societies. We’re free to drown ourselves in pornography; we’re free to ignore others in grave need even when we have more than adequate resources; we’re free to eliminate the next generation while they’re still in the womb; we’re free to say hateful, irrational, and patently false things on social media; we’re free to isolate ourselves from the marginalized in society so that we don’t have to deal with them. And where has this kind of “freedom from” gotten us—probably to where St. Paul told the Galatian it would take them—“biting and devouring one another” and “consuming” one another. Is this where we want to be? I’m afraid it may be where we are!**

 **Paul added, “Live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the Spirit has desires against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want.” We all know the adage, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” This means that the goal of life is to live by the “freedom from” scenario. Do what you want, whenever you want, and get as much stuff and gratification as you can in this life. I saw a bumper sticker that replied to that adage. It read, “He who dies with the most toys is dead--really dead.” It’s reminding us that spending our lives to get all we want won’t make a bit of difference when we die, and it will leave us really dead, spiritually dead. Living in pursuit of the “freedom to” as Paul wrote, “If guided by the Spirit,” leaves us *not under the Law of don’ts and restraints,* but under the freedom to go beyond the law to growth, and knowledge, to service, and community, and to the Kingdom of God. Albert Einstein said, “Everyone has been given an endowment that he or she must strive to develop in the service of mankind” (*Survey Graphic* 24, August 1935). This is not freedom from restraint of law; this is St. Paul’s “freedom to” – to be all we are called to be, to utilize all the potential God has instilled in us. The man in the gospel told Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.” But did he? Will I? Will we? It’s not easy! But it is the only thing that matters. Think about it!**