

FAITH DAY – Curve Ballpark Bishop’s Homily Notes - June 26, 2010

How wonderful it is to be here, - gathered as we are, in this public arena!

I wish to begin by thanking all those responsible for organizing and bringing to fruition today’s Faith Day gathering. That includes my diocesan staff under the coordination of Mrs. Francine Swope, - our friends at the Altoona Curve with Rob Egan who was once a part of my team and is now the Curve General Manager, - and, of course, the Lozniaks, owners of the Curve baseball team and dedicated members of our Diocesan Church.

And, there are many others who have assisted them. I am grateful to them all, - as well as to you who gather as the Church of Altoona-Johnstown and to our friends in Christ who have come to join us.

During my youth, it was not uncommon to hear the voice of the announcer for the Detroit Tigers baseball games coming from neighborhood radios, - whether they were on the porch while someone was mowing the lawn, - in the car while it was being washed and polished on the front lawn, - or in the house heard through the screen door. “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” was a familiar tune.

For many, - happiness is going out to a baseball game. For us Catholic Christians, that can also be true. But, even before that, happiness is suppose to be coming to Mass, - celebrating Eucharist together, - where we come together to give thanks for the freedom that we enjoy as God’s sons and daughters.

This afternoon, we are doing both, together, in the same place.

In another week, we will be observing the anniversary of this nation’s independence. We relish the freedom that we enjoy as United States citizens. Yet, that matters little unless we are able to enjoy the personal freedom that our Lord affords those who are the followers of Jesus.

Basically, happiness is being free, - free in the spirit, - free in the Lord.

However, as our Holy Father recently reminded his listeners in Saint Peter’s Square, “Conforming more to Christ is essential so that we can be truly free. This way true certainty and the deep essence of the law can grow in us, which is the love of God and our fellow man.”

The Apostle Paul spoke of the freedom that a Christian enjoys. Today’s readings from Sacred Scripture do, as well. It is our “attachments” that lure us away from Christ and bind our personal freedom. Of course, the freedom of which we speak is not a matter of doing whatever we wish, - which, frequently, is not freedom at all.

In the first reading from the First Book of Kings, we heard how Elisha, having been chosen to be a prophet like Elijah, felt bound by relationships before he could freely accept his call. In the Gospel Proclamation, we heard some of the same on the part of those wishing to follow Jesus. They had other things that they felt they had to do. In the

second reading from a Letter to the Christians at Galatia, the Apostle Paul speaks of freedom as a freedom of service.

Now, all this can sound quite contradictory. As a Christian, I am called to be free but not free to do whatever I want. My freedom in Christ actually obligates me to be a servant, - to be of service to others. And, then, did we as a new nation not fight to be free so that we would not have to serve England? So, how is it that a Christian can consider himself or herself “free?”

For answers to questions such as this, I often turn to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I hope that you do, as well. (Of course, I am referring to that wonderful volume of truth, which the Church gave us in 1997, through Pope John Paul II and the then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI.)

The *Catechism* states, “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, ... to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life.”

The *Catechism* further notes, “The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes.”

We have been created for good. To be able to do what God would have us do is true freedom. There are so many forces striving to prevent us from doing that and enjoying the freedom that comes with it. Those forces have all kinds of names and take all kinds of forms. They seek to enslave us for their own benefit; - and, they do, when we allow it.

We would like to think that we enjoy freedom. In another week, there will be a host of activities celebrating the birth of our nation, where we are to be free. And, yet, in some respects, we are not, - simply because, in those instances and as a nation, we have stopped serving the human race and have turned inward exclusively to ourselves. It would be good for us to return to the principles of our Founding Fathers.

As individuals, we are enslaved by so many addictions and prejudices. With the Apostle Paul, we could say all too often, “I do what I do not want to do and do not do what I want to do.” Only in doing good do we find true happiness, - because in so doing we encounter the very face of God, the Ultimate Good.

I would like to think that we, as a Diocesan Church, have recovered a degree of freedom during the past two decades. We have discovered that the mountains give us a common identity rather than separating us one from another. We have learned that separate houses of worship have nothing to do with who we are, as faithful followers of the Lord Jesus. We have experienced the way of the cross as the way that leads us into a more authentic life in the Lord.

We have much for which to be thankful. There is reason for happiness. We have cause to celebrate our faith this day, - even at a baseball stadium. In the game of life, every one of us has been allotted a certain number of innings. And, while we may have struck out in the past, the important thing is that we not let that prevent us from getting back up to bat whenever the Lord pitches us the ball. Eventually, it WILL be a homerun!