

Fortnight for Freedom 2015 – Suggested Sunday Homily Helps¹

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 21, 2015

Readings: **Job 38:1, 8-11**
 Psalm 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31
 2 Corinthians 5:14-17
 Mark 4:35-41

First Reading

- Today, from the Book of Job, we heard the Lord’s reply to Job’s questioning. Scripture says that God addressed Job “out of the storm.” Don’t we sometimes feel as if we are in the storm as well?
- God does not immediately give Job comfort, but rather reminds Job of *Who God is*.
- As the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom with the theme “Freedom to Bear Witness,” we reflect on who God is and what our responsibility is toward Him. In the midst of the storms in our own society, we are mindful of the Lord’s words to Job that it is the Lord who “shut within doors the sea.” In other words, God is God and no other – including the government. Our allegiance is to God as we bear witness to the truth about marriage as the union of one man and one woman; the truth about the dignity of all human life from conception to natural death; the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant; and the truth about the need to protect and preserve our first freedom – religious liberty.

Responsorial Psalm

- Our Psalm reminds us to give thanks to the Lord at all times.
- In the “storm wind” that we will undoubtedly experience in life, we call upon the Lord in our distress. It is the Lord, says the psalmist, who will hush “the storm to a gentle breeze.”
- Today, the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom, with the theme being “Freedom to Bear Witness.” As we reflect on the state of religious freedom throughout the world with Christians in Syria, Iraq, Africa, and elsewhere being exiled from their homes and brutally martyred, we pray that the Lord calm these storm winds of persecution.

¹ For each Sunday, there are bullet points for each reading, including the Responsorial Psalm, so that the homily can be anchored in one or more readings. Thus, the bullet points for each reading do not presuppose that other readings will be used for the homily; therefore, each reading has free-standing bullet points related to the Fortnight for Freedom. Throughout, the emphasis is on witnessing to the faith (Freedom to Bear Witness), and in doing so being in solidarity with Christians being persecuted elsewhere in the world, particularly in Syria, Iraq, and Africa.

Second Reading

- In the second reading, we are reminded of our responsibility to live a life in Christ: “so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” We are, therefore, called to be witnesses of Jesus.
- If we live for Christ, truly, then we have nothing to fear. Today, the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the “Freedom to Bear Witness.” The English word “martyr” originates from a Greek word meaning “witness.” During these times, we are mindful of the many Christians being martyred in Syria, Iraq, Africa and elsewhere in the world. These courageous brothers and sisters of ours are certainly “no longer liv[ing] for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” These Christians are living and dying for Jesus.
- St. Paul says that “whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” We are no longer the scared disciples in the upper room; we have received the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Jesus in the world. We are called, therefore, to exercise our “Freedom to Bear Witness” and stand in solidarity with Christians throughout the world.
- We can stand with other persecuted Christians, when we are willing to be persecuted for bearing witness to the truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman; to the truth that the intentional taking of unborn human life is murder; to the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant; and to the truth that religious liberty in our country is under assault. We have many opportunities to “no longer live for [ourselves] but for him who for [our] sake died and was raised” – to live for Jesus the Lord.

Gospel

- Picture the boat being tossed on the waves, and a man asleep in the stern. Only a person without fear could be asleep at such a time. In the midst of the violent storm, the disciples were not abandoned – Jesus, calmly and fearlessly, remained with them.
- That boat can very well be the Church in our world today, being tossed about by the storms of persecution. Christians are being martyred in Syria, Iraq, Africa, and other parts of the world. In faith, we are called to stand with these brothers and sisters of ours.
- This Sunday, the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom, with the theme being “Freedom to Bear Witness.” In the midst of the storm of assaults on marriage as the union of one man and one woman; on the unborn; on the poor, the sick, and migrants; and on our religious liberty, Jesus asks us the questions he posed in today’s Gospel: “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?”
- Rather than cowering to terror – to the fear of being marginalized, socially shunned, publicly ridiculed – we instead demonstrate our faith by defending true marriage, the unborn, the poor, the elderly, and religious liberty. In doing so, we stand in solidarity with Christians around the world who have sacrificed so much more, including all of their property and their very lives.
- We know that in the end, the King of kings and Lord of lords – Jesus Christ – will command the storm to “Quiet! Be still!”

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 28, 2015

Readings: Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24
Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13
2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15
Mark 5:21-43

First Reading

- In the first reading, we are reminded that God did not make death. Rather, he came that we might have life.
- We know that in creation, life and freedom are inextricably linked. God created man and woman, blessed them, gave them all that they needed; and gave them freedom to love. In creating us in His own image, God desired that we be free as he is free.
- The only thing that can truly hamper our God-given freedom is sin, which leads to death. As the reading from the Book of Wisdom says, “by the envy of the devil, death entered the world.” It was not God’s will that we suffer – “God did not make death” – but that we follow him.
- The Catholic Church in the United States is currently celebrating the Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the “Freedom to Bear Witness” – to marriage as the union of one man and one woman, to the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, to the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant, and to religious freedom to live one’s faith in public life. Importantly, we recall that our freedom does not come from this world, but from the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm

- The Psalm continues on the theme of God saving us from our enemies and from the “netherworld.” God is our rescuer. We pray that God would rescue our Christian brothers and sisters around the world from the persecution that many face every day.
- Today in particular we echo the psalmist in praying that God will “not let [our] enemies rejoice over [us]” and that he “turn [our] mourning into dancing.”
- As the Catholic Church in the United States celebrates the Fortnight for Freedom, with the theme being “Freedom to Bear Witness,” we pray that God not let our enemies rejoice over us as we bear witness to the dignity of all human life, to the truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, to the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant, and to our first freedom – religious liberty.

Second Reading

- In the second reading, we heard: “your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality.” For years, we have enjoyed freedom of religion in our country. We have had an abundance, and through our abundance I hope we supplied for others’ material needs. But in another sense, those who have been suffering the lack of religious freedom around the world have shown an abundance of something else: faith and trust. We need this today.
- I am sure you are aware of the intense religious persecution that Christians are undergoing in the Middle East and parts of Africa. We should be mindful of these

Christians as the Catholic Church in the United States celebrates the Fortnight for Freedom.

- Please pray for our brothers and sisters who are undergoing suffering for the name of Jesus.
- We owe it to them to stand up for the religious freedom that we have enjoyed in this country, so that we may continue to show the world that it is possible to respect the consciences of people and live together in peace.
- If we are afraid of being marginalized, think about the Christians in Syria, Iraq, and Africa who have been brutally martyred and others who have been exiled from their homelands. If we hesitate to say that we are pro-life, for man/woman marriage, for the poor, for the migrant, and for religious liberty in conversations with others, think about the Christians who have been kidnapped and killed by Boko Haram and ISIS. Stand up for them by standing up for the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Church.

Gospel

- In the Gospel today we have two stories of healing linked forever by Christ's intervention. At the beginning, we meet Jairus and hear about his daughter. As Jesus goes with Jairus to his house, we meet the woman suffering from hemorrhages.
 - Jairus, a synagogue official, goes directly to Jesus to ask him for something. The woman, in contrast, tells herself that she only needs to touch Christ's cloak to be healed. Both, in their own way, demonstrate faith.
 - Jesus, however, by his actions, publicly reveals the woman's faith. Thus, Jairus's faith and the woman's faith are publicly known.
- Jesus wants our faith to be publicly known. As the Church in the United States celebrates the Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the "Freedom to Bear Witness," we are reminded to make our faith in Christ and our membership in his Church publicly known.
- As we pray for the "Freedom to Bear Witness," we pray for the courage to witness boldly to the Truth, which is to bear witness to Jesus Christ who is the personification of all truth.
- May we publicly bear witness to the truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman; the truth that intentionally taking an unborn life is murder; the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant; the truth that religious liberty around the world is under attack, as Christians are being exiled from their lands and brutally martyred; and the truth that when we stand for our religious liberties in this country, we are standing in solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.
- When we publicly exercise our "Freedom to Bear Witness," we will be ridiculed. Jesus in today's Gospel was also ridiculed, and we are mindful of his words elsewhere in the Gospel where our Lord says, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:20) and "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first" (Jn 15:18). We can certainly take consolation in today's words of our Lord: "Do not be afraid; just have faith."