

Freedom Is Gift

Freedom is a gift. Similar to many valuable gifts, it is delicate. It must be developed, protected and welcomed as a friend in making moral decisions no matter how complex. Freedom is so essential in our lives that the issues of merit or blame only become relevant when we have made free choices.

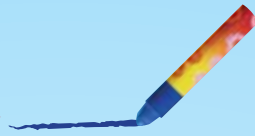
Conclusion

In Galatians, St Paul teaches us that when we did not acknowledge God we were slaves to gods that did not exist. He reminds us that now we have acknowledged or rather have been known by God. Paul cautions us not to go back to slavery a second time. There are many forms of slavery in contemporary life. Our protection from these forms of slavery is communion with God who can keep us free.

Points for Examination from the Heart

- How would you define 'freedom'?
- How do you use freedom in your personal life; your family; your workspace?
- What do you understand by 'conversion'?
- What happens to an object or person who's unfortunate enough to fall into quicksand?
- What do you understand by the 'quicksand of sin'?
- Does one fall into sin accidentally?
- To whom should we cry out for help when we're being 'sucked under' by sin?

For children



Draw a 'before and after' picture of someone who has fallen into sin and has been saved.

Tell stories about persons who have overcome difficult circumstances:

- in your village/parish
- in Trinidad and Tobago/Caribbean
- in the world

Can you name a saint who chose to follow God's Word despite the doubts of family and friends?

Praying with The Word

Memory Verse:

"Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love be servants of one another" (Galatians 5:13-16).

Towards Transformation

Reflect for about five minutes on what you have just read/heard about reviewing the quality of our relationships. **Think** about ways in which you may improve your relationship with your spouse, child, friend, neighbour. **Write** in your notebook a simple plan for when you will start your improvements and what you expect the result(s) to be.



Called to be Catholic

OUR FREEDOM AS BELIEVERS

(Adapted from the **Archbishop's Column**, published in the *Catholic News* 15 March 2009)

Freedom
believers

Pope Benedict XVI speaking of the conversion of St Paul offered a descriptive definition of conversion. He said, "to be converted means to believe that Jesus has given himself for me dying on a cross and as risen lives with me and in me. Entrusting myself to the power of his forgiveness, letting myself be taken by his hand, I can come out of the quicksand of pride and sin, of deceit and sadness, of selfishness and false security, to know and live the richness of his love."

The image of "quicksand" is very helpful in considering the issues of freedom, conversion and repentance. Unlike water in which one can float or swim until help arrives, in quicksand one sinks almost immediately.



Self-help will not save the person in quicksand. Help must come from the outside. The applicability of the image to the Christian life is clear. The source of help in the quicksand of sin must also be outside the person. It is Jesus. He is always present and always available. It is not possible to survive without him. We must ask for and accept his help.

The Concept of Freedom

The freedom of a human person can be understood:

- 1) negatively – to be free from coercion, not being forced physically or psychologically.
- 2) positively – to be free to act, to be in possession of oneself, self-sufficient and to be in control over one's actions.

No person is totally free. Our freedom is conditioned by heredity, environment and personal history. But we must avoid the implications of determinism, i.e., that we cannot rise above heredity, environment and personal history so why even try.

History has proven many times that people with difficult beginnings and challenging chapters in their lives have become more and more free and developed into outstanding and influential people.

The Freedom of the Children of God

Freedom, properly understood, is directed to a basic and profound relationship with God who is the ultimate purpose of our lives. It enables us to act in the positive ways, noted above. Freedom deepens under the influence of the Spirit. It helps us to become free in areas of our lives where we must humbly admit, at this point in our lives, that we are not free.

Education In Freedom

Education in freedom has the same goal as education in general – to free the student from whatever oppresses. Believing people have a dignity that is rooted in the fact of faith that they have been created in the image and likeness of God.

Authentic freedom, according to Vatican Council II, is a sign of the divine image within all people.

The Council has emphasised that all people are bound to seek the truth including religious truth, to adhere to that truth once it is known and to order their entire lives in accord with the truth. Truth and freedom cannot be separated. Without truth, freedom can become chaos. The truth will make us free. Our freedom will then grow through the choices we make during our lives.

To form the conscience is a particularly important element in the education process for freedom. Ongoing conscience formation helps the believing community avoid making moral decisions based on feelings and the unfortunately common contemporary view that sin does not exist.

The Misuse of Freedom

The presence of sin in our lives is a misuse of freedom. It can place us in the "quicksand" of pride and sin that Pope Benedict referred to during his Angelus prayer exhortation. St Paul exhorts us, "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love be servants of one another" (Gal. 5, 13-16).

Once again, the Holy Father offers us a helpful insight. He states that in St Paul's writings, flesh is not a reference to body. It is a reference to what he (the Holy Father) calls "the absolutisation of the self." He teaches us that the "absolute I" deceives people into believing they can do anything they want. Eventually, such a falsehood degrades and can even destroy the human person.