

## FREE TO BE FULLY HUMAN (Lk 4:14-21)

There is a story about creation called the "Fable of the Birds". After God had created all of the animals, they were all walking around discovering what it was like to be alive. All except the birds! They were doing nothing but complaining because God had given them a heavy burden that he had given to no other animal: those awkward things on their shoulders. They weren't good for anything: they couldn't grab anything with them; they couldn't use them to walk with; and being covered with feathers just made them unwieldy for pretty much everything. They thought God must be punishing them somehow. They kept asking "why." Why us? Why these ugly, useless arms? Finally, two or three of the more adventurous birds began to move their arms. They began to flutter them and move them faster and faster. Soon they discovered that the very things they had thought of as a burden actually made it possible for them to fly. And no other animal could fly. They could see incredible sights from above the ground and travel great distances at a time unimpeded by things on the ground. Their heavy burden turned out to be a beautiful **gift**.

Jesus tells us today that he has come to set us free! Free from our poverty, free from our captivity, free from our blindness, free from our oppression --- free to be fully human and fully alive! But we may not think that we need to be set free, that we are already free. After all, we live in the United States, the land of the free. It can be difficult to believe that we are burdened and need to be relieved of that which oppresses us and does not allow us to be truly free. What keeps us from being free is the darkness which we harbor within our minds and our souls. It's easy to say that we want to let go of the darkness when, in reality, we have grown comfortable with it. Many of us may not go to confession at all, or if we do go, we probably confess the same sins over and over again which means that we are comfortable with our sinfulness and thus are reluctant to change and maybe face the deeper darkness which lies within. The burden is familiar and we don't truly want to be free. We are captives to our sins thinking that it's pretty much okay. But, sometimes, the Lord is able to break through in spite of ourselves.

"Lord, you invited all who are burdened to come to you. Allow your healing hand to heal me" and set me free. So begins a prayer which I pray each day at the beginning of the day.

We find God in the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives, not necessarily in a great manifestation of glory and splendor. And God doesn't take a vacation but rather goes along with us on our vacation. Late last year Mary and I took a trip to Colorado. At the last minute we changed our route because of the weather; they were receiving some of the earliest recorded snowfall. Rather than risk getting blocked by closed roads through the mountains between

Grand Junction and Denver, we went through Albuquerque and then north from there. That change forced me to face some of my worst nightmares from my past, memories which had been suppressed for 20 years but which God was telling me that it was time to heal. After all, I had been praying to be unburdened, and now I was being granted my request. Poor Mary! She had to suffer through my agonizing journey with my cross; it felt like I was being beaten and was going to be crucified, but in actuality it was just a little emotional and psychological anguish which resulted in severe physical pain. On the journey Mary was talking with a friend on the phone who asked her if she was having fun. And Mary replied, "Not yet!" That vacation wasn't a lot of fun for me, but today I am free of the pain of those memories, and what is left are fond memories of a part of my life that made me into who I am today. I would never have planned the trip the way we actually went; my pain would have prevented that from happening. God surprised me, caught me off guard, in order to heal me, in order to set me free.

We hear Jesus saying today that the scripture is fulfilled in him. The Word of God is now the person of Jesus. He calls himself the Son of Man, a term which means that he is the fullest personification of humankind, the human we all were created by God to be. Clearly, words had not been enough to convince people of who they truly were; the Hebrew people had studied scripture for hundreds of years. So now Jesus is here to show them, to show us today who we are as the personification of "love." To be the Son of God is to be on a mission of liberation. Wherever human life is impoverished, imprisoned or impaired, it will become enriched, enabled and free. Son of Man is not a title of privilege, but a call to transformative action. What we see and hear and touch in Jesus is now who **we** are called to be. We have been shown how to fly above this earthly life, above our mortal existence into eternal life in the here and now. Being a member of the Body of Christ, being called Christian, is not a title of privilege, but a call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus by allowing God to transform us and the world through His love. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, as we celebrated two weeks ago. And we, too, have been anointed by that same Holy Spirit at our baptism, made part of the Body of Christ, made part of the Word of God, called to be fully human and fully alive in the love of God. And, as such, ours is the same mission as Jesus, "to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."

If we look closely at the birds of the air and study their wings, it is amazing how different each of them are and yet that all of them can fly. From the tiny wings of the hummingbird which flutter at incredible rates of speed to the large wings of the soaring eagle which enable it to fly high above the earth, wings are what set birds apart from every other creature. Humans have tried to imitate the flight of birds and have not been able to duplicate what God has given to the birds. But we have been given something even greater, the most wonderful gift of all, that of being a child of God, free to live in love and joy and peace. We

don't have to be chained to this earth, to the things of this world, because we are members of the heavenly world. We've all seen pictures of saints with a halo above their heads depicting their holiness. Well, we, too, have been given a halo, a call to holiness, as our special gift from God. That halo sets us apart from every other creature. We may ask like the birds in the fable "why" or "what is that for" or we may complain that we don't want it. But that "halo of holiness" is our special gift amongst all of God's creation and that gift enables us to be free through the power of love, free to be totally human like the Son of Man.

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