

IF THE SON SETS YOU FREE YOU WILL BE FREE INDEED

(Jer. 31:31-34; Rm 3:19-38; Jn 8:31-36)

Today is Reformation Sunday. The theme is freedom in Christ. One wonder, what is freedom in Christ? Why were the Reformers concerned about freedom in Christ? Most people define freedom as being free to do whatever they want. But when we read the parable of the prodigal son, we realize that, this is exactly the freedom we don't want. Getting an early inheritance, leaving home and going off to indulge in immoral gratification is not true freedom. No sooner had the prodigal son left than he realized that his freedom had become like a self-enslavement.

In today's Gospel lesson, *Jesus said to Jews who believed in Him*; the Jews for Jesus; ***"If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** These words of Jesus constitute a course in discipleship. They constitute a declaration that committing ourselves to Jesus is the only true path to freedom. We all come to Church because we see ourselves as disciples of Jesus and freedom is found only in Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us in precise detail **the four steps needed to become free in Him:**

1. It begins with **Faith or Belief: "Sola Fide."** The Reformers, Martin Luther included, what the Bible teaches that **justification is by Faith alone.** ***"Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him..."*** He did not address those who did not believe in Him but those who believed in Him. Justification is thru faith in Christ alone. ***Faith is the substance of things hoped for the substance of what we have not seen.*** For us, it is trusting in the finished work of Jesus. It is a deep commitment of heart to what Jesus has already done for us on the cross. Commitment is much more than an intellectual exercise. Faith is commitment and a full surrender of our lives and wills to Jesus. Discipleship begins with faith; full faith in Jesus brings us to Jesus.

2. The major step is to **abide in His Word: The Reformers called this-- "Sola Scriptura"**— **that the Sole Authority of Scripture is what should guide Christian life.** Jesus says, ***"If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples...."*** It is required of a believer to continue in the Word. How? We must move into a new residence or take residence in the Word. This means that we should fill up a U-Hall with all that we own: furniture, décor, plants, pictures to be hang on the wall and then make a permanent resident in the Word. The believer is in the Word to stay or to make residence. Hundreds of people reject Jesus without ever really knowing who he is to them. Examining the evidence from Scripture makes a person know the truth. That is why the Bible was translated into many languages. Formerly only priests were allowed to read the Word. But the Word is not written only to be read by priests. We are all priests accordingly to the priesthood of all believers (1Pet.2:5) and can read the Bible freely. John writes at the end of his gospel saying, ***"Many other things Jesus did that are not written in this book, but these things are written in order that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and believing, you might have life in his name,"*** (John 20:30,31). Obviously, then, if we want to know the truth, we must begin to examine Scriptural evidence to get it.

3. **True Discipleship:** Jesus suggests more steps to becoming ***"truly his disciples."*** That means there are two kinds of disciples; True disciples and fake disciples. They are Christians by name or nominal Christians; these pseudo believers follow for a while, they are interested, they join

Church as an organization or a fraternity, but they never inwardly commit their hearts to Jesus. However, if these were to abide in the Word and continue in it, the Word would catch hold of them and they would begin to find the Word to be practical, pragmatic and relevant to their lives. They would *then really become his disciples*. It is important to understand that *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*. We never find freedom until we have come to know the truth in the Holy Scriptures and receiving Jesus as our personal Savior.

Nicodemus, who knew all the Old Testament as a teacher of Israel and an expert in the Torah, came to Jesus by night (John 3:1-15) to know what more he had to do. And Jesus said to him, *"Unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God."* When Nicodemus inquired how that would happen, Jesus said it would be *"by the Spirit and the Baptism,"* using the symbols, of water and wind. The Spirit can lead us to the truth of the Word. Once the Word take root in the heart, a transformation occurs and one's life is changed to become a real disciple. True discipleship is a process. It does not happen all at once. It happens as one continues in the Word and that person's value system is changed. *"You will know the truth and the will set you free."*

4. The goal after believing in Jesus, staying in his Word and being truly disciple-d is to Be Set Free: Freedom in Jesus is not hereditary. **One may be born a Jew but is not a guaranteed freedom in Christ.** We can't hold on to some heritage that *"We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to anyone."* This is to forget Jews were slavery in Egypt, Babylon, and that they had been under the Assyrian rule, the Greek and Roman empires. Moreover Jesus is talking about freedom from sin. All human beings *have sinned and keep falling short of the glory of God*. We are all slaves to sin and cannot free ourselves. We may be "children of Abraham" by blood and yet are enslaved to sin.

Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."* (v.34). This is a profound statement because we let ourselves do wrong in attitude, word and deed and become enslaved to sin. Sin has become our master and we find it hard to break from it. Slavery is the opposite of freedom. The problem is this that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. Slavery is to lose the possibility freedom. Wrong deeds and wrong thinking bind us in an invisible net. Sin is like an addiction. When we finally decide to quit, we cannot quit on our own. That's why we need Jesus to stay in the house/residence called the Word, a symbol of privilege that does not slip away .

Here is the good news: *"If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. Salvation is only in Christ.* We are set free in Jesus to become sons like He is and we remain in the house forever. Nothing can take that pleasures and privileges from us.

Jesus breaks the power of sin; He sets the prisoner free; His blood can cleanse a sinner clean. **We need Faith alone, the Word alone, and Grace alone to become truly his disciples. Amen!**