

Independence Day

Ave Maria Church, July 4, 2022. Fr. David M Vidal

A reporter was asking different people what *Independence Day* meant to them. And even though these people came from different walks of life, they had one common answer. All of them mentioned freedom as the reason for the celebration. Now, the reporter did not press on. He did not ask the difficult question: “What does freedom mean to you?”

Our secular and modern society carries a mistaken idea that freedom means a license to do whatever you want. According to this thought (perhaps we should even call it “agenda”), people can say the most abhorrent words, commit the most disgusting and evil actions, and nevertheless, say with a straight face, “I am free to do that!”

There is something wrong with this conception. In his book, *Things Worth Dying For*, Archbishop Charles Chaput explains the fallacy of this misconception with these words: “The decline of real freedom is a feature of modern life. Tolerance is revered as the badge of an enlightened people. But an unwillingness to name evil, to teach right from wrong, and to resist the behaviors that wickedness creates is a recipe for license, not freedom.”

True freedom, then, is not the ability to do whatever you want. The ability to do whatever you want without caring for the goodness or evilness of the act is named *licentiousness*. According to its definition, licentiousness means “the lack of legal or moral restraints in moral behaviors.”

Freedom is not licentiousness. Freedom fosters good people. Licentiousness fosters criminals. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever you want but the ability to know and do what is good!

Those who advocate for this kind of “freedom” that does not know moral boundaries (and that truly means “licentiousness”) never speak about responsibility. However, there is no freedom without responsibility. There is freedom because there are values that you treasure as the highest ideals that you want to exercise, and consequently, you want to respect and protect.

True freedom and responsibility go hand in hand, and as Archbishop Chaput says: “Our responsibility is to Truth. Jesus himself said that ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,’ (Jn 8:32).”

Truth is the heart of freedom. There is no freedom without truth. Now, truth is not an abstract idea that is not involved with people and events. Truth is not merely something

you read about in books. Truth is and must be in our minds and hearts, in our decisions as individuals, family members, and members of a nation. Truth is not an abstract idea but the highest ideal that must be incarnate.

In fact, the Truth became flesh and dwelt among us, and He taught us with his life what it means to be truly free. Then, by conforming ourselves to Jesus, the Truth incarnate, we become truly free.

In another book, *Render unto Caesar*, Archbishop Chaput asks this question: “What needs to be done by Catholics today for their country?”

Then, he provides the answer: “The answer is: Don’t lie . . . If we say we’re Catholic, we need to prove it. America’s public life needs people willing to stand alone, without apologies, for the truth of the Catholic faith and the common human values it defends. [And] one person can make a difference – if that individual has a faith he or she is willing to suffer for.”

So simple and so true: don’t lie. If you want to preserve the gift of freedom, do not lie. That simple determination will have an immediate impact on your entire life.

Don’t lie to yourself by using double standards, don’t lie to society when you need to stand for the gifts of life and family, and don’t lie to your country when you are called to exercise your civic duties. If you want to defend freedom, be an agent of truth!

A final point: we must not be ashamed of the truth.

There is another misconception that permeates our secular and modern society: it is claimed that the acceptance of the highest ideals of goodness and truth is reduced to church. Then, when we put a foot outside the church, we are “free” of those “religious” conceptions.

Is that true? Would it be right to have one personality inside the church and suddenly, when we cross the church doors, have a completely different one? This is a false interpretation of the separation of religion and State. This is a misconception fostered by secularism.

According to the Cambridge dictionary: “*Secularism* is the belief that religion should not be involved with the ordinary social and political activities of a country.” This definition helps us to understand the problem. Secularism is a belief; secularism is a kind of religion that shouts: “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19: 15). Secularism is a profession of faith in the world.

Secularism is a false religion, and we Catholics must show that we follow the Truth who became flesh and dwelt among us, not just in the church, but in the world, in the place where we live, at home, in the office, in the school, in the playground, and in whatever place we find ourselves.

In his book, *Catholics in the Public Square*, Bishop Thomas Olmsted warns us that “The separation of Church and state all too often is used as an excuse to silence people of faith and to discourage them from legitimately participating in the public square. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution, of course, does not advocate for a separation of Church and state at all, but rather the protection of religious freedom from the state.”

If we take our faith seriously, we will not remain silent about our faith. If we take the highest ideals of goodness and truth seriously, we will not remain silent about them. And if we remain silent, sooner or later, the freedom that we enjoy will be taken away from us.

Let us celebrate our freedom by being agents of truth. Then, we will truly be free. Amen