



Our freedom, our choice, is to live as Christ lived

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Fourth of July is a civil celebration, but for us Franciscans—indeed for all Christians—any commemoration is infused with a sense of God’s presence. While many of the Founding Fathers of our nation did not believe in the kind of God we believe in as Catholic Christians, several were Christian, and others acknowledged some kind of godly presence worthy of giving direction to our lives and our common project of national government.

But what kind of freedom do we celebrate?

We no longer remember what it is like to be taxed without representation in the sense that the colonies were taxed by England. (Although, now that I live in the District of Columbia, there are some echoes of those feelings.)

The tyrannies that oppress us are most often those that result from our own choices: whether we discipline our tongues and typing, how much we succumb to the “demand” technology makes that we be ever-accessible and immediately respond to every notification, as well as other choices we make about money and food and where we will live, how well we might insulate ourselves from our “leper.”

By the time this article goes to print, I will have given a day of recollection on *Fratelli tutti*. You might remember Pope Francis’ letter, which begins with those words of St. Francis addressing all the brothers and sisters. The words are taken from his *Admonitions*, which we need to remember are intended as an encouragement rather than a scold, so rarely are we “admonished” as the word should properly be used.

As a boy, playing music from *Fiddler on the Roof*, I could relate to Tevye’s yearning to be a rich man. It’s so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that generosity is the realm of the affluent. Yet I have often found those struggling to be far more generous—even sometimes by objective measures—than many affluent people.

What prompts us to be more generous? Sometimes we give more to a person we like, someone who pleases us in some way. Maybe we recognize that we have so much, and the person in front of us has so little. We choose to be generous. As Christians, we are free to be as Christ, yet more generous than anyone could imagine.

I’m writing this article on the feast of St Anthony of Padua. In the Gospel at Mass, Jesus tells us that if someone demands our shirt to give that person our cloak as well. These words are more difficult to hear this year than ever, with one nation’s ruler demanding territory and subservience from another independent nation. What kind of freedom do you think Jesus is admonishing or encouraging in us?

Certainly at the least, Jesus is reminding us to be gracious and generous even in the face of demanding, ungenerous persons. Is there a situation in your life where this freedom is a challenge? May our Franciscan fraternity and the fraternal admonishment and encouragement we owe each other help us to answer these challenges well!

Pope Francis explains gratuitousness: “the ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves, without concern for personal gain or recompense” (*Fratelli tutti*, 139). We have a choice, a freedom, to do things because they help us, or to do things because they are good in and of themselves.

Our freedom, our choice, is to live as Jesus Christ lived while he dwelt among us. We have reason to trust, to have faith, because the Church has experienced the Resurrection of Jesus, even if we have not personally felt that Power greater than the power of Death. *Blessed are those who have not seen and still believe*. And the living out of our faith is fed by the Holy Spirit we have received in Confirmation or Chrismation, the gift of the seal of the Holy Spirit.