Fourth Sunday of Lent (C)

Gospel text (*Lk* 15:1-3.11-32): Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So to them Jesus addressed this parable: “A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine (...).

The freedom

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(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today, the son travels "to a remote country". The Fathers have seen here above all the interior remoteness from God's world, the magnitude of the separation of what is proper and what is authentic. The son squanders his inheritance on bad living. He just wants to live the high life. He does not want to succumb to any precept, to any authority: he seeks radical freedom; he wants to live only for himself, with no exigencies. He enjoys life; he feels completely autonomous.

The Greek word used in the parable for the property that the son dissipates means “essence” in the vocabulary of Greek philosophy. The prodigal dissipates “his essence,” himself... In the end he has squandered everything. Those who understand freedom as the radically arbitrary license to do just what they want and to have their own way are living in a lie, for by his very nature man is part of a shared existence and his freedom is shared freedom.

—A false autonomy leads to slavery: the “totally” free man has become a wretched slave.

The human freedom is always a “shared freedom”, a "togetherness" of liberty

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Today we see that human freedom is always a shared freedom, a "togetherness" of liberty. Common freedom lasts only in an ordered harmony of freedom that reveals to each person his or her limits.

In this way the gift of the Law on Mt Sinai was not a restriction nor an abolition of freedom, but the foundation of true liberty. And since a correct human ordering finds stability only if it comes from God and if it unites men and women in the perspective of God, the Commandments that God himself gives us cannot be lacking in a correct ordering of human freedom. In this way, Israel fully became a people, through the Covenant with God on Mt Sinai. Israel's encounter with God on Sinai could be considered to be the foundation and the guarantee of its existence as a people.

—Thus, we must continually pray that the Holy Spirit opens us and gives us the grace of understanding, so that we become the People of God deriving from all peoples.