

ALL SAINTS NEWS

9th July 2023
Trinity 5 Pr 9

Freedom of choice?

'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...

I can will what is right, but I cannot do it...'

The interplay in the epistle for Trinity 5 draws attention to the frailty of the human condition, the conflict within us all: we know what is right; we just do not do it (or at least do not always do it). St Paul assumes we want to lead a moral existence (to *'will what is right'*) but will inevitably fail (*'we cannot do it'*). He suggests an explanation which ostensibly is a challenge to the idea of individual autonomy:

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me....

Marvellous! St Paul lets me off the hook (or at the very least appears to¹): it is not I who transgressed but some other spirit (not part of the I but in some undefined way lurking within).

This may appear surprising. Is not the whole idea of Christianity founded on the idea of personal responsibility, the freedom to decide between alternatives and to take responsibility for the choices we make?

Not entirely. For freedom itself is often a contested concept.

Consider the familiar introduction to the Collect for Peace in the Book of Common Prayer:

'O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord...whose service is perfect freedom...'

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So freedom consists in service? Really? On the face of it this is a distortion of its meaning, an oxymoron. Surely freedom consists in the absence of service, in the opportunity to behave well or badly as we wish without being restricted by others? Obviously, we lay ourselves open to praise or condemnation according to the decisions we make but it is surely an odd use of the word to suggest that in opting for the moral choice we thereby enjoy greater freedom than if we settled on the immoral one?

Yet it has long been recognised (most notably by the profoundly atheist philosopher Isaiah Berlin) that there are two elements to freedom: the (negative) freedom from control by others and the (positive) freedom to be one's own master, acting rationally and making independent decisions in our own interests.

Positive freedom may appear simply the counterpart of negative freedom, the other side of the coin; I control myself to the extent that no one else controls me. However, a distinction can be drawn between positive and negative freedom, since a person might be lacking in self-control even when (s)he is not restrained by others. The example most commonly given is the drug addict who is stuck with the habit that is destroying him. He is not positively free (that is, acting rationally in his own best interests) even though his negative freedom is not being limited (no one is forcing him to take the drug).¹

In such cases, it is natural to talk of something like two selves: a lower self, which is irrational and impulsive, and a higher self, which is rational and far-sighted. And the suggestion is that a person is positively free only if his higher self predominates. If this is right, then we might be able to make a person more free by coercing him. If we prevent the addict from taking the drug, we might help his higher self to take control. By restricting his negative freedom, we would increase his positive freedom. (It is easy to see how this view could be [and is] abused to justify interventions that are malign – not least by authoritarian/totalitarian governments - but the principle remains).

The positive freedom of an individual is not however necessarily dependent on a denial of his negative freedom. It is recognised that many of us need help to understand our best interests and achieve our full potential, and that the state has a responsibility to help us do so. Indeed, this is the rationale for compulsory education. We require children to attend school (significantly limiting their negative freedom in the short term) because it is in their best (long term) interests. To leave children free to do whatever they like would amount to neglect or abuse.

After the Second World War a consensus emerged that the state has a responsibility to help us live reasonably fulfilling lives (or at least lives that were not dictated by the ravages of poverty and illness) through the creation of the Welfare State. Only as a result, could the least wealthy be properly free to be their own master, to be truly autonomous. But this was dependent on a progressive tax system which denied others the freedom to spend their money as they wished.

Virtually everyone agrees that we must accept some restrictions on our negative freedom if we are to live a life that is other than nasty, brutish and short. We need laws to restrict us, to enable us to live together and make society function. We accept some limitations to our individual freedom as the price to be paid for other benefits such as peace, justice, security and prosperity. The alternative is anarchy.

But where is the proper dividing line? There is (and should be - it is healthy!) significant public debate over the restrictions on our individual freedom that are appropriate. For example, should the state place restrictions on what we may say or read or see? And how should the state react when individuals break the law to curtail the (negative) freedom of some but do so to advance the (positive) freedom of others? The often loud and angry argument over the activities of Just Stop Oil is just one of many examples where the boundaries between the different notions of freedom are contested.

The secret, it is suggested, is compromise: to identify the common ground where the restraints placed on negative freedom and the benefits of positive freedom can be properly explored, fully debated and broadly agreed so we can achieve a balance between the divergent demands of people with often very different financial and other interests.

The two conceptions of freedom are not necessarily irreconcilable. They can and do often coalesce. Indeed, after proclaiming that *'service is perfect freedom'* the Collect for Peace itself contains a prayer for protection from control by others:

'Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the powers of our adversaries.'

The search for a guiding principle in navigating a passage through this moral maze is not easy. In this, and in so many other ways, the Book of Leviticus and St Matthew's Gospel provide a useful place to start: *'Love thy neighbour as thyself'*.

Adam Chivers

¹ *'Ostensibly' and 'appears to', because elsewhere St Paul advances a different conception of individual autonomy. See particularly 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 2 Timothy 1:7.*

² *The usual analogy is not perfect for the result of addiction can obviously leave the victim of drug abuse subject to the control of others.*

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND
WHAT I DO. FOR WHAT I
WANT TO DO, I DO NOT
DO. BUT WHAT I HATE, I
DO.

- ROMANS 7:15



St. Benedict of Nursia

St. Benedict of Nursia,
stone carving at the abbey in
Münsterschwarzach, Germany.

St. Benedict, in full **Saint Benedict of Nursia**, Nursia also spelled **Norcia**, (born c. 480 CE, Nursia [Italy]—died c. 547, Monte Cassino; feast day July 11, formerly March 21), founder of the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino and father of Western monasticism; the Rule that he established became the norm for monastic living throughout Europe. In 1964, in view of the work of monks following the Benedictine Rule in the evangelization and civilization of so many European countries in the Middle Ages, Pope Paul VI proclaimed him the patron saint of all Europe.

The only recognized authority for the facts of Benedict's life is book 2 of the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory I, who said that he had obtained his information from four of Benedict's disciples. Though Gregory's work includes many signs and wonders, his outline of Benedict's life may be accepted as historical. He gives no dates, however. Benedict was born of good family and was sent by his parents to Roman schools. His life spanned the decades in which the decayed imperial city became the Rome of the medieval papacy. In Benedict's youth, Rome under Theodoric still retained vestiges of the old administrative and governmental system, with a Senate and consuls. In 546 Rome was sacked and emptied of inhabitants by the Gothic king Totila, and, when the attempt of Emperor Justinian I to reconquer and hold Italy failed, the papacy filled the administrative vacuum and shortly thereafter became the sovereign power of a small Italian dominion virtually independent of the Eastern Empire.

Benedict thus served as a link between the monasticism of the East and the new age that was dawning. Shocked by the licentiousness of Rome, he retired as a young man to Enfide (modern Affile) in the Simbruinian hills and later to a cave in the rocks beside the lake then existing near the ruins of Nero's palace above Subiaco, 64 km (40 miles) east of Rome in the foothills of the Abruzzi. There he lived alone for three years, furnished with food and monastic garb by Romanus, a monk of one of the numerous monasteries nearby.

When the fame of his sanctity spread, Benedict was persuaded to become abbot of one of these monasteries. His reforming zeal was resisted, however, and an attempt was made to poison him. He returned to his cave, but again disciples flocked to him, and he founded 12 monasteries, each with 12

monks, with himself in general control of all. Patricians and senators of Rome offered their sons to become monks under his care, and from these novices came two of his best-known disciples, Maurus and Placid. Later, disturbed by the intrigues of a neighbouring priest, he left the area, while the 12 monasteries continued in existence.



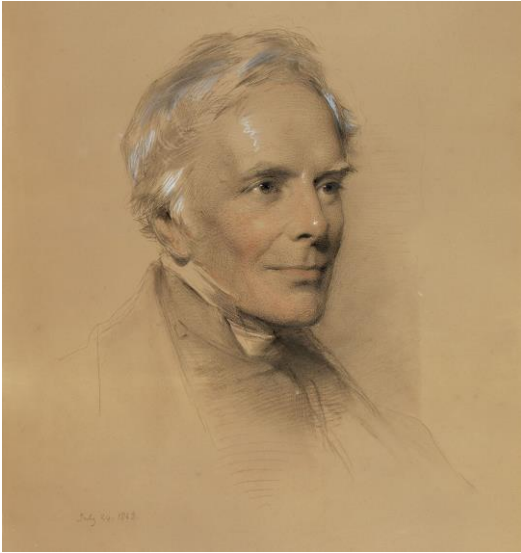
Monte Cassino: Benedictine monastery

A few disciples followed Benedict south, where he settled on the summit of a hill rising steeply above Cassino, halfway between Rome and Naples. The district was still largely pagan, but the people were converted by his preaching.

His sister Scholastica, who came to live nearby as the head of a nunnery, died shortly before her brother. The only certain date in Benedict's life is given by a visit from the Gothic king Totila about 542. Benedict's feast day is kept by monks on March 21, the traditional day of his death, and by the Roman Catholic Church in Europe on July 11.

Benedict's character, as Gregory points out, must be discovered from his Rule, and the impression given there is of a wise and mature sanctity, authoritative but fatherly, and firm but loving. It is that of a spiritual master, fitted and accustomed to rule and guide others, having himself found his peace in the acceptance of Christ.





John Keble.

Born April 25, 1792, Fairford, Gloucestershire, Eng.—died March 29, 1866, Bournemouth, Hampshire. Anglican priest, theologian, and poet who originated and helped lead the Oxford Movement, which sought to revive in Anglicanism the High Church ideals of the later 17th-century church.

Fifth Sunday After Trinity by John Keble

"The livelong night we've toiled in vain,
But at Thy gracious word
I will let down the net again:-
Do Thou Thy will, O Lord!"

So spake the weary fisher, spent
With bootless darkling toil,
Yet on his Master's bidding bent
For love and not for spoil.

So day by day and week by week,
In sad and weary thought,
They muse, whom God hath set to seek
The souls His Christ hath bought.

For not upon a tranquil lake
Our pleasant task we ply,
Where all along our glistening wake
The softest moonbeams lie;

Where rippling wave and dashing oar
Our midnight chant attend,
Or whispering palm-leaves from the shore
With midnight silence blend.

Sweet thoughts of peace, ye may not last:
Too soon some ruder sound
Calls us from where ye soar so fast
Back to our earthly round.

For wildest storms our ocean sweep:-
No anchor but the Cross
Might hold: and oft the thankless deep
Turns all our toil to loss.

Full many a dreary anxious hour
We watch our nets alone
In drenching spray, and driving shower,
And hear the night-bird's moan:

At morn we look, and nought is there;
Sad dawn of cheerless day!
Who then from pining and despair
The sickening heart can stay?

There is a stay--and we are strong;
Our Master is at hand,
To cheer our solitary song,
And guide us to the strand.

In His own time; but yet a while
Our bark at sea must ride;
Cast after cast, by force or guile
All waters must be tried:

By blameless guile or gentle force,
As when He deigned to teach
(The lode-star of our Christian course)
Upon this sacred beach.

Should e'er thy wonder-working grace
Triumph by our weak arm,
Let not our sinful fancy trace
Aught human in the charm:

To our own nets ne'er bow we down,
Lest on the eternal shore
The angels, while oar draught they own,
Reject us evermore:

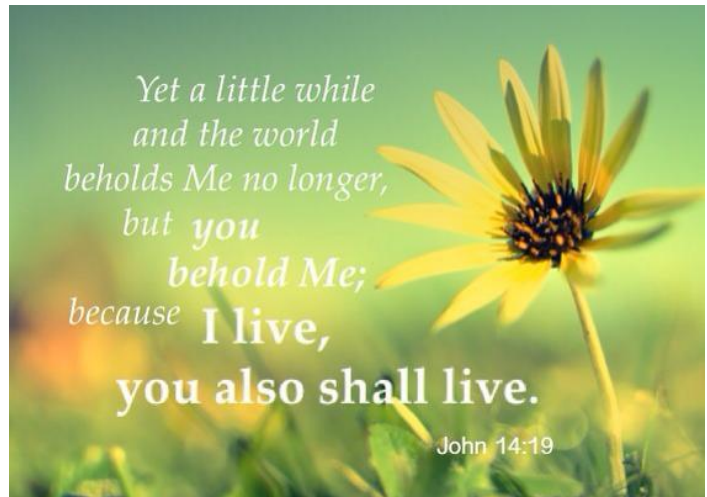
Or, if for our unworthiness
Toil, prayer, and watching fail,
In disappointment Thou canst bless,
So love at heart prevail.

Prayers Requests

'In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.'

(John 14: 19).

Please let Fr Charles know of anyone who would like to be remembered within the weekly prayer list or anyone who you would like to be remembered in prayer.



Those who we remember in our Prayers.

Sunday Tabitha Clark, Ruth and Richard Harding, Katie Norman, Jocelyn and Jack Neal Gordon, Joyce Shepherd, Cynthia Ashford Sarah Bradley Sue Hilliar Steve Cooper Ruth Marson Ryan Lindsey Joanne Cooper Mary Greenacre Jocelyn and Jack Charlotte Essex Lorna Osbon Nadine Benn Andrew Casimir

Monday

Tuesday. Diana Verity

Wednesday , Katrina and Katherine King, Philip Miles, Samantha Tucker, Hugh Farry Shamin Azad George Lympelopoulos

Thursday

Friday Charlotte Hopkins, Andy & Gina Ford, Elisabeth Morgan, Caroline Semon

Saturday

The Departed

Malcolm Davis Jeanne Callow Mileno Graca Rory Young Ros Hawkins Ron Gale Valerie Donkin Hugh Barron Chris Benton Rene Bloxham Hussein Lucus Helen Campbell Arnold Tyson

Years' Minds - this week we remember

Bea Wren Ken Mills Wilfred White Audrey Hopkins Gwen Rundle Dorothy Stephens Raymond Tong Marlena Fitzner Diana Gloria Collins Margaret Hill Marilyn Bateman

ALL SAINTS PRAYERS

Mon 10	Pray for those who today will lose their home, because of war, debt, helplessness or disaster, and for those who work to support them and maintain their physical and emotional security.
Tue 11	Benedict of Nursia 550 Patron Saint of Europe Pray for political stability, and that the UK and other nations may be a blessing to all
Wed 12	Mass 10.00am "The Twelfth" marking William of Orange's Battle of the Boyne victory in 1690. Pray for Northern Ireland on this day when the most significant of Orange Order marches are held. Pray for healing of memories, for forgiveness and peace in communities across the sectarian divide.
Thurs 13	Pray for those working in the Hospitality sector. Pray for the workers who have lost their jobs, security and businesses as a result of the Covid crisis. Pray for the thousands of workers in service industries, restaurants and pubs who work long hours for very low wages and often in difficult conditions. Pray also for those who work to protect workers rights and raise the quality of their working conditions.
Fri 14	Mass 10.00am John Keble, Priest, Tractarian, Poet 1866 Pray for Christian spiritual writers in the tradition of John Keble, that they may be inspired to write words that will carry the prayers of their readers and deepen spiritual understanding.
Sat 15	Swithun, Bishop of Winchester, 862 Pray for those who may wander into a church today or decide to "give it a try" as a result of life circumstances, conversations or inner prompts. Pray that faith in God will be made possible for them.
Sunday 16	6th Sunday after Trinity Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; Early Worship 9.00am Parish Mass 10.30am

If you would like to give regularly to the Church, please set up a standing order to the church account, details below

Parochial Church Council of All Saints

Account No. 65256747

sort code 08 92 99

Gift Aid forms are available from the office

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