

## 28<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (October 9, 2022)

More than once it has happened that I'm riding with someone and we pass something (maybe a building) that I hadn't noticed before. I ask: "oh, that's new; when did that go up?"...only to be told that it has been there for several years already. Talk about feeling more than a little silly, and really oblivious! That came to mind when I was looking at today's second reading a few days ago. I've read that passage from St. Paul's second letter to Timothy many times over the years, but this time and for the first time one line jumped out at me as if I had never seen it before: "the word of God is not chained." Paul was writing about how his preaching of the gospel of Jesus led to suffering and actually being held as a prisoner in real chains. But, he said with courage and even joy, "the word of God is not chained."

What does that mean? Just what is that 'word of God' that is not chained, that is not held captive? First and foremost, it is the entirety of what God has revealed to us—the truth about himself as the one and only God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the truth about who we are as his beloved children made in his image and likeness. Jesus, God the Son and our savior and redeemer, is that Word in its fullness. He taught his apostles those truths, he established the Church on the foundation of those apostles, and charged them with the task of teaching those truths to all the world. That word, that truth has been handed on throughout history by the Church through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

The Church has been faithful to that task over these past 2000 years, handing on that word of God and ever growing in her understanding of what that word means in our own time. That task is especially important in a world like ours today that more and more rejects the word of God on so many fronts and is doing all it can to put that word back in prison chains and throw away the key. For example: this month of October has been observed for many years as Respect Life month by the Church in the United States. The word of God on the right to life for every person, born and unborn, and on the unchangeable nature of marriage and our bodily personhood as male or female continues to be boldly and unapologetically affirmed by the Church.

To say that these truths are unpopular or ignored is a huge understatement. And the degree to which the powers that be in government, education and elsewhere reject those truths and condemn the Church for daring to teach them has become even more extreme since the Supreme Court overruled Roe v. Wade. To give you just a few examples of current attempts to hold captive and in chains these truths about who and what we are:

- In the last 2 ½ years in this country alone there have been over 160 incidents of vandalism destruction and desecration of Catholic churches and other facilities (and countless more against other Christian places). In May of 2020 someone broke into the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis and lit a fire that damaged pews and the floor. And in May of this year pro-abortion messages were painted on the front doors of a Catholic church in Houston, Texas.
- The federal government (the Department of Health and Human Services) has proposed a rule to try to force doctors and other health care workers to perform so-called 'gender transition' surgeries. They even want to force Catholic doctors and hospitals to act against their own conscience and their Catholic faith by doing so.

- Governor Newsom of California recently signed a bill to spend \$200 million more to expand abortion services in that state even more widely than before—e.g. allowing nurse practitioners to perform abortions without doctor oversight and forcing employers to pay for abortions outside of insurance coverage. But Newsom vetoed a bill to provide birth support for mothers based on cost concerns. He is bound and determined to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to push abortion, but refuses to provide more help to those women who actually want to give birth. How utterly sad, how utterly tragic and pathetic. Please, please pray for Governor Newsom and all other public officials who are so dangerously misguided in these most basic areas of human life and dignity.

In the face of these and so many other examples of the militancy and apparent success of those who want silence and defeat the Church and to keep the Gospel of Life and the rest of our Catholic faith in chains, it can be very easy to give in to discouragement and give up the fight—we may think “who can fight against all the very strong and loud forces that are against us?”

But the reassuring fact remains true now as it did for the imprisoned St. Paul: “the word of God is not chained.” For one thing, consider the simple fact that Roe v. Wade, that legal and moral travesty that imposed abortion on demand in this country, is no longer binding on all fifty states. Many have said (and I agree) that the fact of that reversal, in the face of all the strong cultural and governmental forces supporting Roe ever since 1973, is nothing short of a miracle.

Back to the basics: the word of God is not chained. That is true for that word which is the content of our faith and belief, and it is even more true for the word that is Jesus himself. The gospel of St. John begins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelled with us” (John 1:1, 14). And so Jesus therefore is the ‘word of God’ in the deepest sense of that phrase. And who would dare to make the foolish claim that Jesus, gloriously risen from the dead and ascended to the eternal glory of heaven, is ‘chained’ in any way?!

Yes, the Church of Jesus Christ continues to face countless challenges—threats and malice from without and sin and weakness from within. And yes, it seems like the Church is declining in meaning and significance. But that has been the case so many times throughout the 2000 years of Christian history; and every time it seemed like there was no hope, that word of God who is the risen Christ—the head of his body which is the Church—has ‘unchained’ itself (so to speak) once again to bring about a great renewal and reinvigoration of the action of that word in the world. It continues to happen in so many ways, even if it doesn’t always get a whole lot of headlines. And we are part of that great work by our baptism and by our daily pursuit of the prayer and holiness and love to which we are called. “The word of God is not chained”: we can and we should stake our lives and our hope for eternal life on that declaration—because it is undoubtedly and forever true.