

*“This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn and do not weep”* (Neh 8:9). With great joy I celebrate the sacrifice of the Holy Mass this Sunday, the Lord's Day, a day that should be dedicated to rest, prayer and family life. On the sabbath, our Lord, the Word of God, calls us to come together in worship of our heavenly Father so that we may grow in faith and holiness by celebrating the presence of the risen Christ among us.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor”* (Lk 4:18). Every minister of God - be he deacon or priest, bishop or pope - must always make the words of Christ his own, first in his heart and then in his preaching. Every preacher must seek always to proclaim the Good News of hope in Christ and trust in the Father. As a servant of the Gospel I must proclaim the message of Christ because Jesus offers hope, joy and peace to every man, woman and child in every culture, society and age. The words of Christ are neither political nor ideological; they are, rather, that narrow, difficult path of which Christ spoke, the path of authentic peace, justice and freedom, the only path that leads to salvation, the path of God's ways rather than man's ways. The ways of men encourage conflict and strife, resistance and rebellion; they tear down societies and oppress the defenseless. The ways of Christ are radically different, for they are the way of truth and of life, the light of God's love shining out in the darkness of human hatred, prejudice and ignorance of truth.

*“The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed”* (Lk 4:18). The good news of Jesus Christ is the news of freedom from sin which can only be lived where a society is founded upon moral righteousness and social justice for all, even and especially the least, the most defenseless and the most innocent. Where the interests of politicians and political agendas prevail over the word of God, there is to be found the gravest injustice and harshest slavery. The only freedom that promotes the

dignity of man is freedom from sin. Only that freedom which is firmly founded on and grounded in the truth of Jesus Christ is true freedom for he said: "*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.*" (Jn 8:31-32). The truth of which Jesus speaks is not simply an intellectual grasp of the world, but an interior spiritual understanding of the truth about man and his transcendent dignity, about his rights and his duties before God and neighbor, about his greatness and his limitations. It is the same truth that Jesus proclaimed, first with his life and then by his cross and resurrection. Freedom that is not based on the truth of Christ and Christian responsibility is merely licentiousness evading responsibility. True freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom for sin for only this freedom makes us capable of knowing God.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as God is our Father so the Church is our mother, teaching us the way of true humanity and justice, the justice of the kingdom of God, not the injustice of the world. It is necessary always and everywhere to preach the Church's gospel of social justice for it is the gospel of Christ. So long as even one of God's little ones is wounded, oppressed or killed the world has not yet learned the justice of God. So long as the world rejects the commandments of God, it rejects justice and promotes oppression, it rejects freedom and promotes slavery to sin. So long as man refuses the teachings of the Church, he chooses for himself ignorance, darkness and slavery. To be Catholic is to live in union with Christ and his Church for by our baptism we have been called to become one body, one mind, one spirit in Christ for the sanctification of the world. May the Holy Spirit the giver and promoter of freedom enlighten our hearts and our minds to the demands of our freedom in Christ and may Mary, the mother of all Charity, obtain for us, her children, the gifts of God's freedom and justice founded on personal holiness and faith in Jesus Christ.