

FAITH MATTERS

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LIBERATION FROM SLAVERY'S BONDAGE

BY FR. JOHN RICCARDO



“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and the opening of prisons to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ISAIAH 61:1-2

This passage from the prophet Isaiah is quoted by Jesus in Luke 4 at His inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth. He uses this passage to give the listeners (i.e., us!) an understanding of what He has come to do: He has been sent by the Father to save (that is, after all, what “Jesus” means: God saves). He has been sent to liberate this race from the slavery of sin, which is nothing more than the failure to live freedom excellently; He has come to liberate us from the tyranny of the devil and of death; He has come to save us from the bondage that enslaves so many in the fear that we are unloved, don’t measure up, or are alone. “Not true,” He says!

“You are more loved than you could ever imagine! Behold, I have come to reveal to you the Father’s delight in you, His desire for you to share His own everlasting joy! For you, I have come to do battle with all that wages war against your race!”

Though Scripture reveals to us the reality that the most intense and

devastating slavery is slavery to sin, that is not meant to diminish the horror of other, more physical, forms of slavery. In fact, disciples of Jesus have from the beginning understood that one of the ramifications of God becoming man in the Person of Jesus is that there are no unimportant persons, and that every person is absolutely equal in dignity, no matter their size, age, ethnic background, level of income, or any other attempt to discriminate. Unfortunately, many of us living today do not realize that the injustice and brutality of slavery is not something confined to history books but is in fact raging today; there are some twenty to thirty million people today who are enslaved in human trafficking.

FRANCIS’ DECLARATION AGAINST SLAVERY

This past December 2 in the Vatican, Pope Francis met with religious leaders from all over the world for the signing of the “Faith Leaders’



Universal Declaration Against Slavery.” In this declaration he writes, “The physical, economic, sexual, and psychological exploitation of men and women, boys and girls, currently holds tens of millions in inhumane and humiliating bondage. Every human being — man, woman, boy, and girl — is the image of God; God, who is love and freedom, gives Himself through interpersonal relations; therefore, every human being is a free person, destined to live for the good of others in equality and brotherhood. Every person and all people are equal and their freedom and dignity must be recognized. Any discriminating relationship that does not respect the fundamental conviction that the ‘other is like myself’ consti-

tutes a crime, and very often an abhorrent crime. That is why we declare in the name of all people and of everyone of our own Creed that modern slavery — in the form of human trafficking, forced labor, prostitution, or the trafficking of organs — is a crime ‘against humanity.’ The victims of this are from every walk of life, but most are found among the poorest and the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters... We call to action all people of good faith, leaders, governments, businesses, all men and women of good will, to give their strong support and join in the action against modern slavery in all its forms... I ask the Lord to grant us today the grace to convert ourselves in the proximity of every person,

without exception, offering active and constant help to those we encounter on our path — whether it be an elderly person who has been abandoned by everyone, a worker unjustly enslaved or unappreciated, a refugee caught in the snares of the underworld, a young man or woman who walks the streets of the world as a victim of the sex trade, a man or a woman driven to prostitution by the deception of people who have no fear of God, a boy or a girl mutilated for their organs — and who call to our conscience, echoing the voice of the Lord:

“I say to you whatever you do to the least of My brothers, you do to Me.”

ONE WAY TO HELP

At our parish, we have been moved powerfully by the Holy Spirit to try to spread the word on this outrageous scourge in our world and to

try to do what we can to not only make people aware of modern slavery but to try to alleviate the plight of those who are stuck in bondage. One of the ways we felt moved to do this was to sponsor the rescue of a family in slavery in honor of and in the name of the exceptional work every member of our parish staff does. There are a number of great organizations out there that do this kind of thing.

As a tangible reminder of what was done in their name, and as a reminder of what Jesus has done for us and in turn calls us to do, we gave to each of our brothers and sisters on staff a set of iron keys — a symbol of the freedom that has been given to a family that one day, in heaven, we will meet! Let us thank the Lord for what He has done for us! And let us resolve to do what we can to be His instruments in this world to bring freedom, both spiritual and physical, to those still in need!





FR. JOHN RICCARDO

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