

# Fortnight for Freedom

## **Introduction: Charles Carroll of Carrollton**

Still standing and beautifully restored is the home of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence. On his estate, Doughoregan Manor, (located about 30 minutes from Baltimore) there is a lovely chapel made necessary by the fact that in colonial Maryland it was illegal for Catholics to worship publicly. Charles Carroll built this chapel not only for private meditation and spiritual comfort but also because he linked practicing one's faith with serving the common good. He advised his grandson, Harper, to adhere to the principles of his faith "not merely in theory but in practice". As an elder statesman reflecting on his life as a Catholic in public service, he said that securing religious freedom was the greatest benefit of the American Revolution and teaching of Gospel morality one of the best means of preserving liberty. One might say that he cherished the link between the Eucharist celebrated in his chapel & his life spent in the service of others.

## **Source and Summit**

Almost 200 years later, the Second Vatican Council illuminated that link between Eucharistic worship and service of the common good when it taught that the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life" (LG, no. 11; CCC, no. 1324). For the source of the Christian life is the love of Christ, crucified and risen; and through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit the Eucharist is alive and brimming with the Presence of Christ. Christ is present in the priest who offers the Eucharist, in the worshipping assembly. Christ is present to us when the Word of God, in the Scriptures proclaimed, and Christ is most especially present in the Eucharistic species, that is, in the bread and wine that are totally changed into his Body and Blood.

Today's Scriptures tell us that, just as God provided manna from heaven as the Israelites made their way through the desert toward the promised land, so Christ, the Bread from heaven, gives us his very own Body and Blood to cleanse, unite, and nourish us as we journey like pilgrims toward the new and heavenly Jerusalem, our true and lasting home in heaven. This is the food that comes from heaven and leads

back to heaven and it is meant to change everything along the way...

And so, sharing in the Eucharist is meant to change us, to transform us inwardly. As Pope Benedict once said, “It is not the Eucharistic food that is changed into us but rather we who are mysteriously transformed by it” (SC, no. 70). It is a transformation that extends to every part of our lives. It should shape how we think, the decisions we make, & our relationships with others. In the words of the 2nd century martyr, St. Irenaeus of Lyons: “Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking” (ibid).

The form or the shape which the Eucharist imparts to the Church herself and to our lives as individual Christians is – charity. For the Eucharist is “the sacrament of charity” (St. Thomas Aquinas, ST III, q. 73, a. 3.), “the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God’s infinite love for every man and woman” (SC, no. 1). When we share in Christ’s love by participating worthily in the Eucharist we are formed after the pattern of Christ’s self-giving love ... the love poured forth on the Cross and in every celebration of the Mass. *This* is the love that opens our eyes to the dignity of the poor and vulnerable. *This* is what impels us as individuals and as a church community to spend ourselves in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, providing jobs for the unemployed, serving the needs of unaccompanied minors and immigrants, reaching out to victims of human trafficking, freeing those trapped in the drug culture, and providing a good education for young people from impoverished neighborhoods. By entering the dynamic of Christ’s self-giving Eucharistic love, we are impelled also to work for a loving and just society where the dignity of human life is respected from conception until natural death and all the stages in between.

### **The Lodestar of Human Freedom**

On many occasions, Pope Francis has made it clear that the Church is not to be a secular social service agency good as such agencies may be. We are to be more than a mere NGO, “non-governmental agency” – Rather we are to have a heart, a Eucharistic heart, in all that we do – a heart possessing the vision, truth, and love that flow from the Eucharist.

For in the Eucharist we encounter the Eternal Son of God who assumed our

humanity. By doing so he revealed the Father's love for us and in the Father's love he shed radiant light on the dignity of each person. In receiving the Eucharist, we digest, as it were, the truth about the human person - and for that reason we are called to bear witness to teachings on human life, on marriage and the family, on sexuality, & on a range of social issues, even when those teachings are seen as unpopular and counter-cultural.

Yet in those very teachings lies the key to human freedom and happiness. In the prophetic words of Pope Benedict XVI: "Jesus Christ is the lodestar of human freedom. Without him, freedom loses its focus, for without the knowledge of truth, freedom becomes debased, alienated, and reduced to empty caprice. With him, freedom finds itself" (SC, no. 2). ... Or, as Pope Francis just yesterday said: "Religious freedom is not simply freedom of thought or private worship. It is the freedom to live according to ethical principles, both privately and publicly, consequent to the truth one has found."

### **The Re-Discovery of True Freedom**

As this third Fortnight for Freedom begins on the Feast of Corpus Christi, we have gathered to worship in this venerable Basilica and across the nation so that the Eucharistic Lord may help us and our fellow citizens find true freedom. We are here to discover more deeply the truth about love which is the essence of God, convinced that when our souls possess "charity in truth" our lives will be dedicated to 'serving in love', to "doing the truth in love".

In many parts of the world, people are dying because they profess their faith and seek to worship as their consciences lead them. Here in the United States challenges to religious freedom are more subtle, less easy to see, yet very real. Increasingly government at all levels is asserting itself in the internal life of churches, telling them that houses of worship are fully religious whereas religious schools and charities that serve the common good are less so, and therefore less deserving of religious freedom protections, for example, in the HHS mandate for sterilization, contraception, & abortion-inducing drugs, in requiring Catholic adoption services to place children with same-sex couples, in state laws that make it illegal for churches to serve the needs of the undocumented, and in discrimination against Catholic humanitarian services because they refuse to provide so-called "services" that

violate Catholic teaching.

This evening let us keep in the forefront of our hearts the millions of people who are served by Catholic humanitarian agencies, by Catholic Charities, by parishes, and by generous individuals throughout these United States. Let us look at them not merely as statistics but as persons created in God's image and called to enjoy friendship with God, that friendship which, by God's grace, we have found in the Eucharist. We are seeking for the Church and for Church institutions no special privileges. We are seeking the freedom to serve, or as Pope Francis once put it, the freedom to proclaim and live the Gospel "in its entirety". May we find in the Eucharist the source and summit of our charity and in that charity may we advocate by word and witness for the robust freedom of individuals and churches not only to worship without fear but indeed serve others and the common good in in love, truth, joy, and freedom.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!