

THE SEVENTH WORD — THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

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There is no word more often used in our modern world and more often misunderstood than the word *freedom*. Almost everyone thinks of it as freedom *from* something, but rarely as freedom *for* something. Some think they are free only because they have no ball and chain on their feet, without ever adverting to why they want to be free, and what is the purpose of life.

The root of all our trouble is that freedom for God and in God has been interpreted as freedom from God. Before we ask what you do with your freedom, let us turn to the life of Our Lord and our Lady, for the supreme example of how freedom is to be used.

The first word Our Lord is recorded as speaking in the Scripture is at the age of twelve: "I must be about my Father's business" (*Luke 2:49*). During His public life, He re-affirmed this dedication to His Father's Will: "I do always the things that please him" (*John 8:29*). Now on the Cross, when He goes out to meet death by freely surrendering His Life, His last words are: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (*Luke 23:46*).

Father—Note the word of

Eternal Parenthood. He did not say *Our Father* as we do, for the Father was not His and ours in the same way. He is the Natural Son of the Father; we are only the adopted sons.

Into thy hands—These were the hands the prophet called "good"; the hands that guided Israel to its historical fulfillment of God's Providence; the hands that provided good things even for the birds of the air and the grass of the field.

I commend my spirit—Surrender! Consecration! Life is a cycle. We come from God and we go back again to God. Hence the purpose of living is to do God's will.

When Our Blessed Mother saw Him bow His head and deliver His Spirit, she remembered the last Word that she is recorded to have spoken in Scripture. It was to the wine steward at the marriage feast of Cana; that day when, in the language of Crashaw, "the unconscious waters saw their God and blushed." "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye" (*John 2:5*).

What a beautiful valedictory! They are the most magnificent words that ever came from the lips of a woman. At the Transfiguration the Father spoke from

the Heavens and said: "This is my Beloved Son . . . hear ye him" (*Matthew 17:5*). Now our Blessed Mother speaks and says, "Do His Will." The sweet relationship of three decades in Nazareth now draws to a close, as Mary is about to give Emmanuel to us all. She does it by pointing out to us the one and only way of salvation: complete consecration to her Divine Son. Nowhere in the Scripture is it ever said that Mary loved her Son. Words do not prove love. True love is surrender of the will and such is her final injunction to us: "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye" (*John 2:5*).

Both the last recorded words of Jesus and those of Mary were words about freedom: a freedom *for* something. For Jesus it was the will of the Father, for Mary the will of the Son. This is the law of the universe: Nature is for man, man is for Christ, and Christ is God's.

What do you do with your freedom? You can do one of three things with it:

1) Keep it for your selfish desires.

2) Break it up into tiny little areas of trivial allegiance or passing fancy.

3) Surrender it to God.

If you keep freedom only for

yourself, then, because it is arbitrary and without standards, you will find it deteriorating into a defiant self-affirmation. Once all things become allowable, simply because you desire them, you will become the slave of your choices. If your self-will decides to drink as much as you please, you soon find not only that you are no longer free not to drink, but that you belong to drink; it is your master, you are its slave. Boundless liberty is boundless tyranny. The abuse of freedom ends in the destruction of freedom. This is what Our Lord meant when He said: "Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin" (*John 8:34*).

The second way to use freedom is to become like a humming bird, hovering first over this flower, then over that, but living for none and dying without any. In that case, you desire nothing with your whole heart, because your heart is broken into a thousand pieces. You thus become divided against yourself; a civil war rages within you, because you are striking out in contradictory directions. You change your likes and desires when dissatisfied, but you never change yourself. You become very much like the man who complained to the cook at break-

fast that the egg was not fresh and asked for another. She brought in an egg a minute later, but when he got to the bottom of it, he found it was the same old egg turned upside down. So it is with human nature; what has changed is the desire, not the soul.

As a result your interest in others is not real. In your more honest moments you discover that you have dealt with them on the basis of self-interest; you let them speak when they agree with you, but you silence them when they disagree. Your moments of love, if you looked into your soul, are nothing but a barren exchange of egotism—you talk about yourself five minutes, and your neighbor talks about himself five minutes, but if he takes longer you call him a "bore."

No wonder such people often say: "I must pull myself together." Thus do they confess that they are like broken mirrors, each reflecting a different image. In essence this is debauchery, or the inability to choose one among many attractions; the soul is diffused, multiple, or "legion," as Satan called himself. And this is the sad state of millions in the world; they are free *from* something, but

free *for* nothing, because they have no purpose in life.

Finally, you can use your freedom as Our Lord did on the Cross, by surrendering His Spirit to the Father, and as Mary bade us at Cana, by doing His Will in all things. This is perfect freedom: the displacement of self as the center of motivation and the fixation of our choices, decisions, and actions in the words of Our Lord: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are all like limpets that can live only when they cling to a rock. Our freedom forces us to adhere to something. Freedom is ours to surrender; we are free to choose our servitudes. To give that freedom to anything less than the perfect never brings ultimate peace. But to surrender to Perfect Love is to surrender to happiness and thereby be perfectly free. Thus to "serve God is to reign."

But we are frightened to give away our will. Like St. Augustine in his early life we say: "I want to love you dear Lord, a little later on, but not now." Fearful of One who comes to us purple-robed and cypress-crowned, we ask: "Must Thy harvest fields be dunged with rotten death?" Must gold be purified by fire? Must hands that

beckon bear the red livid marks of nails? Must I give up my candle, if I have the sun? Must I give up knocking if the door of love is opened? Do we not act toward God as a child who represents the affectionate embrace of his parents, because it is not our mood to love? Francis Thompson so reflected when he heard these words from the mouth of a child: 'Why do you so clasp me,

And draw me to your knee?
Forsooth, you do but chafe me,
I pray you let me be:
I will be loved but now and then
When it liketh me!'
So I heard a young child,
A thwart child, a young child
Rebellious against love's arms,
Make its peevish cry.
To the tender God I turn;—
'Pardon, Love most High!
For I think those arms were
even Thine,
And that child even I.'

There is hope for you if you are dissatisfied with your present choices, and you want the Perfect: the very void you thus create makes it possible for God to fill it. I would rather hear you say, "I am a sinner," than to hear you say, "I have no need of religion." If you admit you are a sinner, you acknowledge the need of a Redeemer; but if you have no need of religion,

then you are your own god, and if you are God, I am an atheist. If you are empty, God can pour in His waters of Life; if you are self-intoxicated, there is no room for anything else.

No man who has ever shed a sincere tear before God for the way he abused his freedom was ever lost. Even in an earthly way, have you ever noticed how much more beautiful the hills look when there are tears in your eyes. You may even see rainbows of hope. Our Lord took St. Augustine to Himself even though Augustine lamented: "Too late, O ancient Beauty, have I loved Thee."

So He will take your freedom to choose between good and evil and make it a freedom in perfection and goodness if you but surrender to that "love we fall short of in all love" and to that "Beauty that leaves all other beauty pain."

This is the week Divine Love died for you. He makes His final appeal as Love crucified. When dictators want the wills of men, they nail them to a cross.

When God wants our wills, He permits Himself to be nailed, that He may never force and that we may be uncaught cap-

tives in the hands of Love.

Do you know anyone else who loves you enough to die for you?

You know your own mind, yes; but do you know your own heart? Your tears may be dried; but your heart, never.

Only God can fill that. May you then give Him an hour a day in prayer and meditation always remembering that it does not require much time to make you a saint; it requires only *much Love*.

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year through a number of stations varying from 90 to 110, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting usually of an address, mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers—though sometimes of talks by laymen, sometimes of dramatizations—and of sacred music provided by a volunteer choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. An average of 100,000 audience letters a year, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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