

Father O'Connor's Homily for 6 July 2025
Fourteenth Ordinary Sunday-C

Isaiah 66: 10-14c
Galatians 6: 14-18
Luke 10: 1-9

On this Independence Day weekend, we thank God for the freedom that we enjoy in our nation, the United States of America. We pray that "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" – three unalienable rights which the United States Declaration of Independence says have been given to all human beings by their Creator, and for which governments are created to protect – be safeguarded and defended for everyone.

We salute and honor our flag as we pledge our allegiance to "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Our flag, and what it represents, is precious to us. But there is another symbol that speaks of the freedom that Jesus won for us: the cross. Saint Paul acknowledges this in today's second reading from his letter to the Galatians: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

A mother asked her young son what he had learned that day in his religion class. He said, "We learned this dumb song about a cross-eyed bear whose name was 'Gladly.'"

"Well, that's an unusual song for religion class," his mother said. "How did it go?"

"Like this," he said. "Gladly, the cross I'd bear."

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

A person can live in a lovely home and still feel like a prisoner. A person can have lots of money and can travel the world and still feel like a prisoner. We look to the cross for our true freedom in life and for our release from things that can imprison us.

Our possessions can imprison us. There was the Johnstown Flood in Pennsylvania in 1889. Two fashionably-dressed young women had just boarded a train to spend the weekend in Philadelphia. The South Fork Dam broke and they were told to get off the train and head for high ground. They did – and then noticed that their expensive shoes were getting muddy. So they ran back to the train to get their boots. And that was the last they were ever seen or heard of.

Our possessions can sometimes be walls that keep us from good relationships with God and with others. The walls may be beautiful, but they can still be a prison. What can set us free? The cross of Jesus. “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Another thing that can imprison us is our past – sins that we have not sought forgiveness for. There is no pain in life as acute as that of a troubled conscience.

There was a school that was located in a neighborhood where gunshots were frequently heard. So to keep the kids safe, they built a concrete wall that was ten feet high around the school.

One day someone wrote a letter to the newspaper asking: “What if, instead of building a wall, we had used that money to re-develop the neighborhood and make it a safe and attractive place for everybody?”

Our sins: we try to deny them. We attempt to rationalize them by claiming that everyone thinks this way today. We revise God’s commandments to suit our own liking. We overlook the consequences of our sinful behavior.

But we need to get to the root of our troubles and seek forgiveness for our sins – rather than living behind walls that imprison us. Where do we find true freedom and a release from the sins of our past? “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our possessions, our past ... another thing that can imprison us is being preoccupied with the future, and not fully living the present moment.

In an essay entitled “The Station,” a writer compared life to a train trip across the United States and how much there is to see, looking out the windows – cityscapes, the countryside, the townspeople, the animals grazing, the mountains, the valleys and the plains. But sometimes passengers may only be thinking about the station that is their final destination and their estimated time of arrival. And they totally miss out on living the present moment.

The writer says that we do this in life sometimes. We have a station in mind and we think that when we get there, our lives will be just perfect. “When I get my driver’s license, I’ll have it made... When I get the last child through college, my life will be wonderful... When I get that promotion, I’ll be on Easy Street... When I retire and get to enjoy the golden years...” [By the way, how are those golden years?]

Our final destination is heaven where we will be happy forever. But how do we get there? By fully living the present moment, relying upon God's grace, one day at a time.

And where do we find our freedom today? Where do we find our hope for tomorrow? Saint Paul tells us: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

That was his boast – and that is our hope. So, with Saint Paul, we pledge our lives and our loyalty to Our Crucified and Risen Savior by telling Him: "Gladly, the cross I'd bear."