

Are there any slaves here?

“No!” you might say. “Certainly not!” you might protest.

“We are Americans – living in the land of the *free*.”

You might say that, and you would be wrong.

We are all slaves – the only question is who is our master?

St. Paul begins his letter to the Romans by identifying himself.

He does not say he is just an **admirer** of Jesus.

He is not simply interested in Jesus’ **teachings**.

He does not describe himself as a **disciple** of Jesus.

He says “I am a **slave** of Jesus Christ”.

That means, like any slave, his will belonged to Jesus, and Jesus’ will guided his actions.

He told the Galatian Christians, “I live, not I, but Christ is living within me.”

He called Jesus the **Christ** – meaning the one anointed as king; and not just king of the Jews, but King of the *universe*.

He is a slave to the only king who matters – not Caesar – *Jesus*.

But not only that, St. Paul will tell the Romans and us that we are all slaves, too.

The question is whether they are slaves to sin, or slaves of Jesus.

That is the only choice any of us have.

St. Paul said to the Romans, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?”

He is only agreeing with what Jesus says in the Gospel of John: “Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.”

So unless you claim to *never* sin – you are a slave, like me.

What does this slavery look like? Better to ask what does it look like *for me?*

What do you do that you can't seem to stop doing?

Some of us are assassins: our victims are the characters of the people around us and we do them in by our gossip.

Through gossip we do the work of Satan, whom Revelation calls "the accuser of our brothers and sisters".

Some are addicted to shopping or drinking to excess, or sex on a computer screen, or FaceBook likes.

If you're trying to check scores on the ESPN while your wife is trying to talk with you - you're a slave (and not to your wife)!

If you can't pass up a plate of lumpia without sampling 2 or 3 or 10, you're a slave!  
Your will is not free.

St. Paul knew slavery. So do we.

Any of us who try to follow the commandments and the teachings of the Church *on our own* will fail.

We may recognize the good we should do, but we cannot do it consistently.

We can only be freed from slavery to sin by the power of God's grace working through Jesus Christ.

He says, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

St. Paul put it this way to the Romans, "Freed from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness."

What does it mean to be a slave of righteousness?

It means that we are a slave of God, Who is kind, just, patient, merciful and Truth itself.

It means that we choose to be kind, just, patient, merciful and truthful – not because we’re “supposed” to, but because our will is becoming one with God’s.

We *want* to be patient – and his grace makes it possible. Not easy, but possible.

We *want* to be kind – and his grace helps us choose to be kind, even when we don’t feel like it.

God’s life within us makes this possible. Not easy.

That’s our choice: whom we will serve? – God, or mammon;

God or anything or anyone that is not God;

God, or an idol of our own making.

Mary and Joseph are slaves of God

Mary says to the angel Gabriel, “I am the handmaid of the Lord.”

“I am here to do the Lord’s will.”

Matthew describes Joseph as *righteous*; which means he followed the law, which was the expression of God’s will.

Through their obedience, God literally entered the world through Mary’s son, Whom Joseph obediently accepted as his own son.

They become greater than anyone else in the world through being slaves of God.

Our salvation was made possible through their cooperation, through the union of their wills with God’s.

We have a choice: to be a slave to Johnny Walker, or a slave of Jesus Christ.

To be a slave of Sarah Lee and her creampuffs, Louis Vuitton and Coco Chanel, J.C.

Penney and Charles Schwab - or a slave of God.

Only by being a slave of righteousness, a slave of Christ, can we become the person

He created us to be.

Jesus says, “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

We are entering into this final week of preparation for the birth of the Savior. He saves us through his humanity, by uniting his human will to the will of the Father. In the Gospel of John, he tells the crowd, “I have come to do the will of the One who sent me.”

He saves us through his divinity because he is truly God with us, and thus his obedience is sufficient merit for us all.

Let us begin this final week of Advent with the prayer of slaves to sin yearning to be free.

I ask you to think for a moment about what you do that you can't seem to stop doing.

Now repeat a prayer after me. I'll read the whole thing first for you so you can hear it. Then I'll say it phrase by phrase so you can repeat it.

Lord Jesus / I am a slave to my desire. / I invite you / the king of glory / to enter my heart. / If you, the Son of God, set me free / I will truly be free.

Amen!