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2012

Freedom

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "Freedom" (2012). *Spiritual Essays*. 261.

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Freedom

Freedom from oppression is a great good, but freedom for doing well whatever we do is much greater. We seek to be free from what restrains us, but that is of no consequence if we do not freely give ourselves to others. Any of us might be free from control by others, and yet apparently lack the freedom to live a life of purpose. Every form of addiction, including not only substance abuse, but also the felt need to control every aspect of life, can severely limit us, whereas those whose lives are circumscribed by constraints of health or of human imposition are sometimes the ones who speak and act with the greatest freedom in their desire to make life better for others.

Some of our experiences of freedom are external and others are internal; some are mostly physical and others primarily spiritual. We might be free to travel anywhere in the world, and yet have such a narrow outlook that we cannot recognize the goodness of other persons who are physically different from us. Or, we might have so many responsibilities locally that we are hardly able to leave home, and yet be free in spirit enough to find beauty, meaning, and purpose almost everywhere we turn. Other persons can limit our freedom of movement, and our physical condition always places some constraints on us, but no one and no circumstances can take away our freedom to choose our attitudes, beliefs, and determination to love.

If others provide liberty for us, as when we receive independence as a nation or a degree of autonomy in the workplace as individuals, we only need to accept the gifts, we do not have to earn them. However, if we take such freedoms too much for granted, we might fail to exercise freely our interior disposition of gratitude. When we have to make efforts to gain freedom, as when we refuse to be coerced into buying something we do not need, we might value more highly even the apparently small amount of self-determination we achieve. Much of our interior freedom is won in daily reflective decisions to act according to inspirations and insights rather than compulsive influences.

Spiritual freedom is an ongoing cooperative gift which requires our acceptance as an absolute requirement, and is usually recognized as operative when we are able to "do the right thing" even against external or interior opposition. Because such freedom is a gift it is not of less value, but rather more, especially when we acknowledge the intention that is implicit in the gift: love. God creates us freely, in love, and only by responding to love do we grow in freedom. We know from experience that we are pressured from within and without to forsake freedom through participation in hurtful and hateful ways of relating to others, and through misuse of almost

anything that exists. The experience of choosing what we know to be better rather than less good (or even destructive) is that of cooperating in the movement of God, Love, within us.

Freedom is a precious gift, the more so when we participate in becoming increasingly free to love.