

UNIT 3:

Tent Pegs.

I Bring My FREEDOM into Play



The third step is to reflect with the youth on freedom.

The ME and YOU that enter into a relationship can do this in different ways thanks to the fact that we have been endowed with freedom. The history of each person still remains to be written.

This freedom has been given to us as a gift. It must be nourished, formed and ripened, so that, when we bring it into play, we may know how to make our lives and the lives of others more beautiful, since it is in Love, in the image of our Creator, that we find 'True Freedom'.

We are going to dig deep into what we understand by “freedom,” without taking anything for granted.

We are not interested in dictating concepts to our youth, but rather in making them reflect, with the conviction that they are capable of discovering the truth about the human person and the beauty contained in this plan.



Today, it is taken for granted that we all clearly understand what freedom is. But when we stop to reflect on it, we realize that few of us really know what true freedom consists of.

We find ourselves immersed in Western culture, which is very demanding and aggressive when it comes to the topic of individual freedoms. But it is not always capable of seeing beyond this and analyzing how these freedoms affect the common good.

Living in this consumeristic and materialistic society, and having been recently surprised – and left nearly speechless – by the era of new technologies in which everything is possible and almost everything is allowed, many times we lose track of our compass and believe that we are free, when in reality this is not the case.

We want to show the youth that “to be free” is not to do whatever we want, but rather that it has to do with the capacity to do what is good. True freedom is not what many people think it is: making one’s own will become a reality. Rather, being free is being able to give the *gift of oneself*.

Paradoxically, it is through love, understood as the donation of oneself in order to give life, where the human person discovers true freedom.

1. A Character with Strings. Desire for Humanity

“He blew into his nostrils the breath of life”

(Gn 2:7).

- **Why did God make us free?** God reveals man’s own freedom to him, so that man might enter into communion with Him. This possibility demands our faithfulness. God created us to be rational, conferring on us the dignity of persons endowed with the initiative and dominion over our own acts. “Authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain ‘under the control of his own decisions’ (cfr. Sir 15:14), so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him” (GS, 17). (CCE, 1730).
- Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as **a free and responsible being**. We all must respect others. We all have the right to be respected. The right to exercise our freedom is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person (cfr. CCE, 1738).
- Our freedom is always **a created freedom**, and it cannot be understood apart from the fact that we have been born. We have been made free so that we might direct our gaze toward a destination that must be built.
- There is a call from God inscribed in our body, and my freedom is always a reply to his voice. The body helps me receive my life as a gift from God and to respond with gratitude to his invitation to love. **Being free** is being able to receive our life as a gift from the Father and to respond to him with gratitude and love.
- **What is freedom?** Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility (CCE, 1731). Freedom is openness, but not only; it is choice, but it is more than choice. Freedom is, fundamentally and above all, the self-determination of the person through his/her actions. It is the ability that the person has to shape oneself and to decide his destiny through his actions (K. Wojtyla).
- **“It is the capacity to give of oneself”**, which can be better understood when we recognize that no one is freer than he who gives his life for someone else. The most extraordinary example of this is Jesus Christ. We can also see this manifested in the recognition that one of the freest acts is the decision to get married. We can look at how someone freely chooses the spouse to whom they will give themselves completely, and compare this to the erroneous vision of marriage as a “limit to freedom” because it constitutes a “renunciation of everyone else”.

- It is a “**freedom to**” according to a perspective charged with positive meaning, as opposed to the negative connotation associated with the idea of “**freedom from**”.
 - Each interpretation of the word “freedom” is perfectly valid and has a specific realm of application and a concrete interest. What is of particular interest to us right now is that of “personal freedom” or “radical freedom”, the meaning of which complements the other interpretations that we will mention briefly.
- 1.- In the first place, we can mention **social freedom**, which we might consider to be a “freedom from,” since it is a freedom that one obtains for use in a concrete sector (thought, teaching, education, etc.).
 - This is a freedom based on external elements. I request a space where I cannot be subject to coercion. I will either obtain or be given this space, which, in any case, is exterior to the internal exercise of my own will. This is a concept of freedom according to a negative perspective.
 - Once obtained, it “allows me freedom” but it doesn’t lead me to act; it doesn’t produce the content that it protects (freedom of thought doesn’t lead me to think), nor does it give me criteria for how to act. Being able to express myself would be the end goal of this freedom (the attainment of this non-coercive space that is external to the person).
 - This negative concept of freedom is the one almost always used today.
 - 2.- In the second place, we are presented with the sense of freedom that has a specifically moral significance. This sense of **moral freedom** complements the one described above and is related to what happens when our alarm clock goes off. There is a moment of choice: I want to get up, but I can’t. A desire appears, along with an inability to fulfill it.
 - There is a sensation of slavery that has to do with my ability to fulfill my desires. There is not a policeman who can punish me in this case; however, I experience frustration when I feel so very far from fulfilling my deepest desires for the important things in life.
 - **Moral freedom** is related to our dispositions, to our human capacities, to the true desires that I have to fulfill. At this point, a vast horizon opens up for my freedom. Now it’s not so much about telling people what their rights are, but helping them to distinguish from among their desires, and to carry them out.

- **Moral freedom** will grow in the measure in which I fulfill myself; it grows from within the person. On the other hand, social freedom grows from the outside. Human capacities, then, grow through the exercise of this moral freedom and, in that measure, begin fulfilling my truest desires.
- In light of this meaning of freedom, which we can call “**freedom of self-control**”, it is easy to realize that we are not all equally free.
- Clearly, between these two interpretations of the word “freedom,” the most profound meaning of freedom is not the one that refers to social freedom, but the one that refers to moral freedom.
- We can make and recognize the same type of distinction that we made between these two meanings of freedom in authorities as well. In this way, the authority in the family is different from the social authority. The first of the two is oriented towards raising a child, making him/her a better person, helping him/her grow in one area of freedom; while with the second, with the social authority, we might obtain submission but not education or growth.
- From moral authority and freedom we can follow the growth of the person’s self-control, in addition to their ability to guide their desires, ability to direct themselves toward what is the best, and the birth of the virtue that allows them to know the truth of what is good.
- A person with vices is not free; they are lacking self-control, in addition to the knowledge, recognition and acceptance of the truth of what is good, illuminated by the moral law. The law exists for virtue, to make men virtuous.
- 3.- In the third place, we can talk about the **freedom to choose**, which will lead us to tackle the distinction between freedom to choose and freedom of indifference. We will not delve into this topic, except to point out that:
 - The Christian experience places choosing God at the origin of freedom, which entails that the will is undetermined before concrete goods. This means that in front of what is not God, there is a freedom of indifference.
 - According to this line of reasoning, **freedom of indifference** is a consequence of the **freedom to choose**, founded in its relationship with truth. After I have chosen God, the truth, is it indifferent which other goods I choose?
 - Clearly, the choices that we are referring to are not those involved in trivial acts like running errands. Rather, they are moments of decisive importance which include commitment and a “decision about oneself”. In other words, they involve shaping one’s own life either for or against the truth and, ultimately, for or against God.

- 4.- **Personal freedom** is also called radical freedom, or fundamental freedom or freedom of quality by certain authors. This idea of freedom is presented as that which is most constitutive of the human being; not so much as something that he has, but as something that he *is*. This is especially evident in rare situations such as martyrdom, in which **freedom in one's adherence to the truth** elevates the person.
- **From the Christian point of view**, this perspective of freedom is based on a covenant (the covenant between God and man) and its origin comes about through a presence, in the meeting with the other (friendship with Christ, first of all); since the other is different from me, only in freedom can I accept him. This is where the name "personal freedom" comes from.
- What leads me toward self-control is an interior presence that is antecedent to my conscience, which invites me and leads me toward communion with other people.
- One of the principal manifestations of this freedom, in which all of my freedoms converge, is not choosing *things* but rather choosing the *person* I will dedicate my life to. The choice of a spouse consists in the choice of a person, not as an object for me to use but as a person with whom to build a common life. To fall in love is to bind oneself to the person to whom I will direct all of my actions.
- True choice is that which leads me to build my life into a "communion of persons".
- To this end, we can affirm that it is not possible to choose solitude for its own sake, but only in virtue of a specific communion (see EV, 19 §3).
- There is a perverted idea of freedom, which is to believe that it ends where the freedom of another begins. This is the idea that we arrive at when we reduce the idea of freedom to a combination of social freedom and freedom of indifference. We can deduce, as a conclusion, that the best thing to do would be to keep others as far from us as possible. Following this logic, we begin to view the family as something that coerces us: "before I got married I had free time, but not anymore; now there are certain things that I can't do". And we start to equate the family with slavery.
- Clearly, this has nothing to do with the concept of personal freedom. According to that type perverted idea, accepting the existence of God would make me feel like I was being suffocated. I would see Him as someone who is constantly watching me, who doesn't let me do anything. The person who views God in this way ultimately puts Him to one side; they feel better "not thinking about Him", since what they are unable to do is get rid of him completely.
- The same thing happens with the theory according to which man is nothing other than the end product of his biological, sociological and psychological conditions, or the product of his heredity and environment. This conception of man turns him into a robot, not a human being. With this theory, we deny the freedom of man.

- By this point, we have laid out the the experience of freedom as something that man has, that man is, that he longs for, that forms him, that he experiences and searches for in the dark, sometimes confused and deceived.
- While it is true that man is a finite being and his freedom is limited, the fundamental question of freedom does not revolve around the conditions from which we might be able to free ourselves, but rather the stance that man adopts in the face of these conditions.
- **Are we free? Or are we controlled like puppets on a string?** In order to be free we have to decide for ourselves and be our own masters:
 - We ourselves decide to act, which implies a special involvement in our actions.
 - Being our own masters is a requirement of giving: only the person who possesses him/herself can freely love. Whoever does not have self-control cannot take on a commitment in which they give of themselves. Being free means possessing sufficient mastery over oneself, over one's instincts and emotional dispositions, having an adequate level of balance and human maturity. Only he who is the master of his own being can, in a sovereign act of freedom, fully give himself to others. We must have a certain completeness and maturity in order to do this.
- **A freedom born from a gift and for a gift.** We cannot speak about the full meaning of freedom without referring to the essentially free gift that lies at the source of all finite freedom. The "gift dynamic" is found both in the earliest origin of freedom and in its purpose.
 - We recognize that freedom is given to us as a gift, that is to say that it arises from an initial offering that precedes us in every way.
 - Responding to this gift requires another gift on our part, which requires, in turn, that we be mature enough to be capable of an authentic gift of ourselves.
- **What is the role of conscience?** Freedom in man always leads us back to an initial encounter that "awakens" freedom through a call involving the presence of another person.
- **Choosing the good.** When we act, we face the dilemma of choosing between good and evil. In choosing one or the other, we do not merely act in a good or evil way, but we make ourselves either good or evil; we modify our moral being through the exercise of our freedom. This happens through our concrete actions.
- The more we go what is good, the freer we become. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just (cfr. CCE, 1733).

2. What Do We Mean by “Freedom”?

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”
(Jn 8: 32).

- **Why do we seek freedom?** Because it is the only way to reach our fullness as persons. Only using our freedom are we able to become happier and attain the end that we are seeking. We yearn for freedom because our fundamental aspiration is to happiness, and because we understand that there is no happiness without love, nor love without freedom. Nonetheless, only authentic love is capable of satisfying us. True love only exists between people who are able to freely give themselves to the other.
- **Does freedom mean that we have a right to do anything whatsoever?** No.
- **Who is free?** Whoever decides for himself and has mastery over himself.
- **What can condition our freedom and our choices?** “Bound” to many things... Are we slaves? We were not created to be slaves, either of other people, or of our possessions or ideals. Many times our lack of freedom comes from a lack of love. Loving, feeling that we are loved, and accepting ourselves, are necessary for the best exercise of our freedom. If our heart is imprisoned by selfishness and fear, it must change and learn to love, allowing itself to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. Whoever does not know how to love will always feel like they are at a disadvantage, and they will be weighed down by everything. Whoever knows how to love will never feel trapped.
- **What idea of freedom do the youth of today have?** In general, they think about the idea of a “freedom from”. They understand freedom merely as the ability “to do or not do”, “to choose between one thing and another”.
- **The foundations of true freedom.** What is the profound meaning of human freedom? It has to do with understanding freedom as the ability to “give oneself”, a “freedom for”, guided by a “truth” of the person – what he/she truly is – which demands a response. In front of this, I can either orient my actions in one direction or another, either “giving myself” or searching for a selfish end that is contrary to my good.

3. I Bring My Freedom into Play

“...you were called for freedom”

(Gal 5:13).

- **We are called to freedom.** We must respond to this call with all of our personal dimensions (physical, affective, etc.). We discover that we are free through our capacity to respond, because the first motivation that drives our actions comes to us in the way of a call.
- We are not speaking of freedom in a merely “negative” way, as in the absence of constraints. The type of freedom that we are talking about is a dimension of the person, united to the process of our personalization and self-fulfillment. For this reason, it is necessary to train our desires, integrating our affective and rational dynamisms so that our way of acting might be perfect. “Freedom is not simply a privilege to be granted; it is a habit that must be acquired” (D. L. George). This “freedom will shine on you once you have said ‘We want to be free’ from the bottom of your hearts, and to achieve it you are prepared to sacrifice everything and bear everything” (Lammenais).
- **Accepting opposition** is an opportunity to grow in freedom. We are called to overcome obstacles in freedom. To do this, we have to learn to view our own life as a gift, to accept it as a gift, which will allow us to communicate with others in a new way, according to the language of love.
- **To be free** is to choose what we can and to accept what we cannot. We have to train ourselves to accept things that seem to go against our freedom. How can we react in front of something negative?:
 - **I rebel:** I don’t accept myself and I rebel, I reject what is real. I don’t resolve anything. I add one evil to another.
 - **I resign myself:** when I realize that I am incapable of changing my situation or changing myself. This reaction is insufficient. It is a philosophical virtue, but not a Christian one because it lacks hope.
 - **I accept it:** I sense that something positive will come about. This reaction embodies faith, hope and love.

- **What do we bring into play with our freedom?** Our very being as persons. Being a person is equivalent to acting in freedom. My freedom affects my life, and the conditions in which I live affect my freedom.
- Since freedom is self-determination, it shapes us throughout our lives. In other words, we modify ourselves through freedom. Freedom is united to the drama of man, who can either ruin his life or fulfill it. Hence its greatness. Hence its challenge. Life is offered to every person as something to build, because it is not already completed, nor is it written how it will turn out to be. It will be the freedom of each one of us to write it. As St. Gregory of Nyssa said, “Each one of us makes himself through his own decision ... We are in some manner our own parents, since we make ourselves be how we desire”.
- “We can abuse our sight or our hearing, watching degrading shows or listening to gossip, yet not because of this do we become blind or deaf; on the other hand, the misuse of freedom leads us to suppress our freedom, so that, in the extreme, man becomes a puppet shaken to and fro by external influences: propaganda, advertising, popular opinion...” (Thibon).
- **How can freedom unite the choice of what is best for oneself with what is best for others?** Our choices shape our personal identity. We are something, but we want to be more than that – we want to be different -, and this is the path that we walk along thanks to freedom. Our own life becomes a story shaped by decisions. To choose is to make a bet, to risk. Freedom puts us “on the line”, it is a ‘participated creativity’. In freedom, openness to the infinite is united with the concreteness of history and people: freedom arises from a first love, which it brings to the final end of communion (cfr. VS, 86).

4. True Choice

**“I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved”
(Jn 10:9).**

- It is important to be aware that our freedom, as Christians, finds itself immersed in a constant battle in order to direct his/will towards the good. This should always be our choice.

- **The freedom and image of God, gift of God.** It is fundamental to grasp (to make our own, to interiorize in our hearts – and not just learn intellectually) that freedom reaches its perfection when it is directed and oriented toward God. God placed the desire for happiness in the heart of man so that, through the exercise of our right to freedom, we would direct our steps toward Him.
- **Why were we created? What for?** We were created out of love, and to love, out of freedom. Freedom is not just awoken by the gift of love, but also led by it to the fullness of communion.
- **The compasses of our life.** Let's take a look at a few things that can help us:
 - **Assertiveness.** This is the ability to communicate in a clear and open way; this ability can be innate, but can also be learned with practice. It refers to the ability to defend our own ideas and rights, expressing what we believe, and to think and feel in a direct and clear way, at the right moment;
 - **Good spirits.** On one hand, this element can be a big help for us in this fight, and on the other hand it is a sign of the coherence between our feelings and the real acceptance of the truth that is made manifest in a virtuous person. In a stubborn person it is more difficult to observe this type of good spirit because of the tension created by their desire to order their freedom toward a good which they have not interiorized as a necessary option. In a person with vices, we might find good moods that are loaded with the cynicism, since he/she might dramatically realize at any moment that they have unknowingly been victimized;
 - **Hopeful anticipation and the ability to affirm** what is true, good, and beautiful...(related to assertiveness). This anticipation must be nourished by noble ideals;
 - **Human and supernatural means:** Of great importance and benefit is the presence both of well-formed persons of trust (parents, teachers, priests, affective-sexual education instructors, etc.), and of material means, such as books, films, etc.;
 - We must transmit **hope in the fight** through the example of people that have in the past, and are currently living through this fight, who are not exempt from occasional falls, but who always have the intention of getting up again, aware of the forgiveness and welcoming of the Father who awaits us. This hope is shown to have a foundation, and it is passed on from generation to generation in the womb of the community of the Church.
- **Why does God want me to be free?** In making us free, God wants us to be responsible for our actions to the extent that they are voluntary. Progress in virtue, knowledge of the good, and *ascesis* enhance the mastery of the will over its acts (cfr. CCE 1734).