

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

“SUMMED UP IN CHRIST”ⁱ

A basic tenet of existentialism, a very common philosophy of the 20th century, is that **‘we invent ourselves.’** John Paul Sartre, the famous philosopher who invented the existentialist philosophy, said that **‘existence precedes essence’**. That is to say, our freedom comes first and what we are, who we are comes as a consequence. In other words, we decide who we will be and what we will be.

Without knowing it, existentialism, as a philosophy, permeates our society. It is especially a common view among young people of western societies. **‘Who are you to tell me what to do?!’** This is the watch word of many young people today. I decide who I will be. You don’t tell me. The Church, the government, has no place in this. Many of the debates today such as homosexual unions and transsexualism, center around this understanding of life. Liberty seems to trump everything.

Sartre was right that the chief obstacle to this view was not the state, not even the Church. The chief obstacle to the existentialist philosophy is God Himself! Why? Because God would represent this moral demand: that my freedom is meant to conform itself to God. And this is why Sartre famously said: **‘If God exists, then I**

cannot be free. But I am free; therefore, God does not exist.’ This is Sartre’s pithy little syllogism and argument for atheism. A lot of people buy this argument today.

This is not just a matter of theoretical interest for Sartre, and for people today, his disciples. It is a matter of life and death: ‘If there is some great power brooding over my freedom, then I can’t say that I am really alive!’

The biblical view of freedom is very different. We see a very profound example of it in today’s second reading from St Paul to the Ephesians. :

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him.’ (Eph. 1:3-4)

All of Christianity is contained in these lines from St Paul.

Notice how attention is drawn to God! The focus is not on freedom, not on our decisions or projects. It is not drawn to any old god, but rather to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What matters to St Paul, and should matter to us above all, is the God disclosed in the mystery of Jesus Christ.

Attention is not on me, not on my projects, not on our own interests!
God is the focus! So, the first question we should ask of ourselves:

‘Who or what really has your attention?’ If you look at this honestly, it may be a very life-changing question to ask.

St Paul referred to Jesus as Lord! Remember that the word, Κυριος, Lord, was used for Caesar alone. Many Christians, including St Paul himself, were killed because they said that Jesus Christ is Lord. Caesar is not the Lord.

So, there is a second question we should ask of ourselves:

‘Who is our Lord?’ Look into this seriously. Everyone has a Lord. It might be your own ego; your own sense of self. It might be a philosophy of our age. It might be your spouse or your family! Someone is control of your life. St Paul implies that there should be one Lord of your life, and that’s Jesus Christ.

If we look at the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, what do we notice? We hear:

‘he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him.’

What matters, as far as St Paul is concerned, is not *that* we choose or *what* we choose, but rather that we are *chosen*. If you let this idea sink into your heart, your whole life will change around.

The existentialist view on clear display today says that ‘what *I* choose is what matters. ... Existence precedes essence.’ St Paul says just the opposite: ‘what matters is *not* what you choose, but rather that you are *chosen*. It is not *your* freedom that matters so much, it is God’s freedom in electing you.

The Bible is a book about election, about God choosing. Recall that Jesus said: ‘**It is not you who have chosen me; it is I who have chosen you.**’ If this is true, then everything changes. Your life is not about you! For Sartre, your life is all about you; your freedom is everything. No! Your life is not about you; you have been chosen.

When did God choose us? ‘Before the foundation of the world!’ From all eternity, God already had you in mind! He has laid out a destiny and a plan for you. He has already seen what part you are destined to play in his ‘theo-drama’; to participate in his plan.

What is the ultimate value of this participation? ‘**To be holy and without blemish before him.**’ Everything hinges on being holy: being set apart for God’s service. Nothing else matters! We must live according to God’s purpose, according to his will! Life is not about our own boring little plans! Our lives are summed up in Christ. When that sinks in, everything changes!

¹ Taken from Father Robert Barron’s homily, ‘Summed Up in Christ’ as found at <http://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/summed-up-in-christ/4819/>