

Osage Monastery 8/1/1995  
Father Bede Griffiths  
Homily - "Freedom - Law"  
Gospel: Matthew 7: 7 - 11

I suggest that we can think of these three stages of religion - religion where we are under the law, freedom from the law, and freedom when we are in that consummate place. We can also add another - St. Paul speaks of a stage before the law, before the law was given, before awareness of conscience. Before that human beings lived in this world like for instance the Native Americans, they were children of nature, not under the law. They had their own customs, traditions, rituals, and they lived in that harmony, but that can't last. It has to go and the law comes, conscience awakens and you begin to distinguish right from wrong, truth from error and the whole world of consciousness divides the world, the conscious divides the world. You begin to separate the good from the wicked, the righteous from the unrighteous and you get all these commandments - don't kill, don't steal, don't commit adultery - and they are already under that law, the moral law. The minute that we think that's all there is - try to do your best, try to keep the law - don't sin, don't transgress in any way, then you can go to Heaven. That is exactly what St. Paul in the gospel came to overthrow. This religion of the law, and I'm afraid it still is with us and we can't do without it to some extent, you see, as though you have to have some moral law. We have to teach children - you can't do this, you can't do that - but that's for children. When you're mature you get beyond the law and this is the real mystery of the gospel. St. Paul says so clearly that we have to get beyond the law. It's very instructive in that reading we had where he says, even when you were dead in sin and so on, He canceled the bond that stood against Him with all of its claims, snatching it up and nailing it to the cross. That bond is the law you see, commandments on stone - you don't do this and you don't do that because if you do, you will be punished and you will be destroyed, and so that is the state of humanity under the law. In another reading God hears the outcry about terrible sin in Sodom and Gomorra, and says, "I must go down and see what to do". God goes down and He wants to destroy Sodom and Gomorra, in fact He does so. And that is under the law where there is all this destruction, judgment and condemnation. Then Abraham comes along, and Abraham pleads with God, an amusing story really, saying "if there are 50 good men, or 40, or 30, maybe 20 or just 10, will You not spare them?" So there is mercy but there's sin and judgment. God goes out to destroy the inhabitants and there's a controversy about exactly what they stood for - down through the years it was thought that it was homosexuality, it was a great sin then you see, and that must be destroyed. There was also another sin and that was probably the lack of hospitality and probably the two went together. But the point is, you see, that in either case there are certain laws people feel are absolute and we must keep those laws and if you don't keep them you are going to be destroyed. God will destroy you. That is the religion of the law, the religion of the Old Testament. There is justice, there is mercy, God may forgive, but there is always judgment and justice and then comes the New Testament and Paul says so clearly that you can't go on living under the law. You're a servant, a slave really, and God is up there counting on this, and He's going to punish you if you don't do it right and that is the religion of the law. And Paul saw that Christ had canceled all that bondage of the law and set us free. So when He was nailed to the tree, Christ took all that judgment upon Himself you see. That was the old idea, that He accepted the whole judgment upon Himself, punishment of sin, He took it on Himself. Because He could accept that totally, He could set humanity free. We are not under the law, once we surrender ourselves. Jesus taught self-surrender on the cross and by doing that he enabled us to make this self-surrender. As long as we're trying to keep the law - be good Christians and do what we ought to do, it's O.K. of course, we have to do what we can, but as long as it's coming from ourselves in our own effort to be good and so on, . . . only when we are able to surrender ourselves, self-surrender totally to God, then something else comes and takes over, and that is what Jesus refers to in the gospel. He makes alot of this prayer of intercession - ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, but the fact is that as long as you are asking out of your ego, you're not going to receive. Unless we experience that surrender, we will ask and we won't receive, we will seek and we won't find. Most peoples' experience is that we ask and we don't receive and we seek and we don't find . . . and that's because we are still living under that law, we are still living under the ego in a separated self. **When we surrender the separated soul, and allow God to take over, then we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. How much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! And when**

the Spirit comes we can keep the law but not out of our own anxiety because we want to look good in front of other people where we don't want to look bad, but simply out of surrender to God and allowing God to act and work in us. Ramakrishna used to say constantly, "I am not the doer." When that Other comes, when the Spirit acts in us, and we're not doing it, but the Spirit is doing it in us, then we begin to know freedom. We're free from the law and we are under grace. We're able to fulfill the law, but no longer out of our own ego, but from a gift of God. We fulfill the law but without being in bondage. So we go on aware that there are judgments in the Church, there is condemnation in the Church. Christians are always judging and condemning other people all the time, but only under the law. But now we learn the mystery of unconditional love, the grace of God, then everything is transformed. But of course it's terribly difficult, we have to get rid of the ego to die and when it dies this mystery takes place . . . this total mystery of transformation and the happiness and the hope of this change. And so this is the result of this mystery that we come from trying in fear under the old law, and now this grace makes this transformation, and it is happening all over the world. People are discovering this new way of being, getting free from the law, getting out from under it, free of judgment, free of condemnation, and they are awake to grace and to transformation. That's where we all are today - in America, in every part of the world, people are searching and people everywhere are finding there is this freedom from under the law, freedom of the spirit. People are finding this everywhere. Something is happening to people everywhere, there is this freedom beyond the law, the transformation of the freedom of the Spirit.