

Bishop Jaime Soto – Homily for the  
Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity  
May 29, 2010

*Bishop Soto gave the following homily at the Mass on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. The Mass was celebrated with religious jazz music and jazz settings composed for the Mass as part of the annual Sacramento Jazz Festival weekend.*

The weekend of the Sacramento Jazz Festival coincides with Memorial Day Weekend. While we savor the varied and vivacious sounds of jazz music during these days, we should also save a quiet moment to recall the many men and women who braved the chaos of war and the many that died in the service of their country.

The consideration of jazz music and war can seem jarring, uncomfortable, and even disrespectful. Yet, if we go back into the history of jazz there is a curious convergence. During the bleak, bitter days of World War II, jazz was moving from the limited audience of small night clubs to the grand dance halls and auditoriums with the emergence of large swing orchestras: Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Count Basie, and Glenn Miller, who died during the war when his airplane disappeared over the English Channel.

The music tried to capture the times: “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B”, “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore”, “Sentimental Journey”, “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree”, and “In the Mood”. In the music of that time, and still characteristic of jazz music, the exuberance of freedom and individuality did not clash but came harmoniously together in ways that captured the American spirit, a spirit that would be undaunted by the dark threats of totalitarian regimes. The war was not about the music but the music reflected the reasons for which waves of soldiers threw themselves on the Normandy beaches and pushed themselves across Europe.

Jazz is a confounding American creation. The music flaunts the freedom of improvisation. It glories in the individual flair of the musician. There is also the inherent discipline that weaves the musicians into a harmonious collaboration. When this is done well, it seems almost natural, like it was meant to be. This says something about the true nature of freedom. Whether it is Myles Davis’s “Will O’ The Wisp” or Brubeck’s “In Your Own Sweet Way” there is a beauty about individual freedom converging into harmony. This does not depend so much on the music score but more on the musician’s soul. You can see it the faces of a jazz quartet looking intently at one another, giving each member room to shine and then coming together with graceful brilliance. We savor those harmonious moments on the stage.

What can be done with the music proposes what can be done in our world. Can freedom and harmony coexist? Is it possible that our souls can find sufficient rhyme and reason to silence the brutal rumbling of war? American Jazz is still an ambassador of freedom and harmony wherever it is heard across the world. Does our society still

measure up to the melodies? The current divisive social discourse so prevalent in our own state as well as our nation questions not only the hopeful themes of our musical heritage. More disturbing is the forgetful neglect of the heroic sacrifices of those past and present so that freedom can find its way to peace and prosperity for all.

Freedom is a divine gift. It has been achieved and sustained with great human sacrifice. The price paid for this cherished gift demands of us who receive it, to cherish it and use it well. Freedom requires a soulful and mindful discipline, a civic asceticism that seeks from among the broad array of voices a harmony of collaboration for the common good. Freedom, exercised as responsibility as well as a right, should dignify and not demean the human person. It should strengthen and not fray the bonds among us.

The lives given in service of that freedom not only convey to us its cost. This heroic generosity also reveals freedom's true calling, to give freely of oneself for the sake of others. The sacrifices of those who have served their country should remind us of our common responsibility to one another. For this one purpose, we are made free.

Today, we also celebrate the Solemnity of the Blessed Trinity, the marvelous mystery of one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can celebrate this mystery because God himself freely and generously revealed it to us. He sent His only Son to live among us so that we could know the Father and live within the Trinity's embrace. The Lord Jesus not only lived among us. He died for us, offering himself for us on the cross. By this great sacrifice we were brought into the harmonious freedom of the Spirit. We would have no other way to truly know who God is, were it not for the love with which he gave himself to us. "God loved the world that he gave his only Son." (Jn. 3.16)

Freedom finds its true soul in harmony with the one who gave it to us. We measure our actions to the rhythm of Sacred Heart of Jesus beating for us. We discover our true voice in the melody of that Spirit of whom Proverbs says in the first reading: "I was *God's* delight day by day, playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the human race." (Prv. 8.22-31) This is a striking image, the Spirit playing. He surely does not play alone. He wants to play with us. He looks intently upon each of us and invites us to look intently upon Christ so that each of us can shine and we can come together in the one melodious song of praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we pray for the eternal rest of all those who have generously served their country. We also pray that with the gift of freedom we may work as well as play so that together we can be the Spirit's delight.