

Homily
Pentecost Sunday – B

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
May 22-23, 2021

Acts 2: 1-11
Ps 104: 1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34
1 Cor 12: 3-7, 12-13
Jn 20: 19-23

To me, the Holy Spirit can be likened to a “free-range chicken...”

Before all this COVID craziness took hold in the world, I used to take cruise ships throughout the world. A former priest mentor used to encourage me to “see the world,” so that I would understand how the faith and life itself was expressed in the various countries of the world.

In following this mentor’s advice, I have been able to visit every continent throughout the world (sans Antarctica). I have passed through Cape Horn in South America and the Chilean Fjords. I was able to enter Buddhist temples in Thailand; I touched the last remnant of the Berlin Wall in Germany. I have travelled through the Mediterranean Sea and (my favorite excursions) have taken trains through the Alaskan wilderness up into Canada.



In regard to this homily, I was reflecting on my yearly post-Christmas trips through the Caribbean Sea and the various islands on which I have stepped. Usually I would board a ship at Ft. Lauderdale, FL or even Miami to begin and end my excursion. On one particular journey, I stopped at Key West, Florida to begin my journey, which was a really interesting place to visit.

Now I have actually visited Key West, Florida once or twice in my lifetime; there is never a better time for me to visit it than on a New Year's cruise while the Illinois weather is not so accommodating to those who wish to escape the cold and snow of the winter. With waters heated to the seventy-degree range, Key West is a perfect place for scuba diving or snorkeling, although my experiences were more enjoyed on *terra firma*. I was fascinated in the stories of "The Little White House," where President Harry Truman used to vacation while the site used to be part of a Navy Base. I visited one of Ernest Hemmingway's home where he wrote one of his literary masterpieces, "A Farewell to Arms."

Most of all, what I remember about Key West Florida is their law that prevented anyone from killing a free-range chicken.

What is the fascination the good folks have for their beloved free-range chickens and why do they let them wander where they wish in their town? Here in Joliet you can be cited by the police if you don't leash your parakeet when leaving the house; in Key West, the chickens seem to rule the city (which, now that I think about it, applies to dogs all throughout Mexico and Latin America as well).

The reason for this law is not for the fear of short-beaked feathered vertebrates. Rather, I came to find out that the chickens down in Key West have a peculiar liking for a certain kind of food that would be completely undesirable to most human beings – *scorpions*. I guess that as long as chickens love to eat scorpions, they are allowed freely to wander through your Floridian yard, restaurant or place of business because, as I have been told, a chicken on your lawn is much preferred to a scorpion in your shoe.

I began to compare, someone humorously, to the plight of the free-range chicken in Florida to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As I was eating at a Key West restaurant one day, I started tracking the plight of one of these compact birds as it leisurely took a stroll through the place where I was eating. In my reflective moment, I noticed that the chicken had no cares in the world – the casual pace of its day allowed this fowl to enter and exit life as it pleased. Sometimes a waiter or patron would shoo the beaked ones away, but more often than not, the chickens were causing no harm to no one... except the scorpions and worms in the vicinity. Even some of the patrons would feed the birds some crumbs of bread, which would invite the chickens to stay in the vicinity even longer than before.

In my reflection about comparing the Holy Spirit to a free-range chicken, I wasn't focusing as much on the being of the chicken but rather the activity of the chicken's life. I thought to myself that the Holy Spirit has the same charisms of this feathered creature, acting in a gentle, roaming, almost unrecognizable breath of wind that passes

through every molecule of creation without a care in the world. The Holy Spirit, the breath of God, something accessible and necessary to every creature on the planet without exception, something that each individual must take in in order to survive and yet unrecognizable to the individual because the breath is something we generally take for granted.

I like this image of this gentle, roaming, breath of God drifting throughout all creation because this is the image that our Lord provides for us in today's Gospel from John. It is this gift that remains with us, an image that is just as potent today as it was some 2000 years ago. Our Lord reminds us that the beginning of the Easter Season was all about the empty tomb and the Word of God resurrecting from the dead. But today we are reminded that the end of the Easter Season is all about the Holy Spirit, the breath of God and the gift that is required for our survival and accessible to all, but often is unrecognized and unappreciated.

In today's gospel reading, our resurrected Lord breathes this Holy Spirit on his disciples. With this breath, the disciples receive the strength to forgive sins, to feed the flock, to preach and to heal and to be strengthened to take the gospel message to the people of the world. It is in this breath of God that we find our strength. It is through this breath of God that we are united with the Father and the Son. It is this breath of God which becomes the image that ends our Easter Season today.

And as powerful and theological and as incomprehensible that the Holy Spirit might seem to all of us, educated in the faith or not, the Holy Spirit is also the most accessible gift that we are given, gently wandering and drifting in and out of our lives. With every breath we take, we find life in God. It is the breath that makes that fire possible on the Easter Candle. It is that breath that makes all of us possible in this Church. And as the story I offered you today paints the image of a gentle guest wandering through the orchestra of life, the sequence that we heard prior to the gospel today offers the same image concerning the Holy Spirit:

*You, of comforters the best;
You, the soul's most welcome guest;
Sweet refreshment here below;
In our labor, rest most sweet;
Grateful coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.*

As we conclude this Easter Season on this celebration of Pentecost, I most fittingly offer the following prayer to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity who wanders through our lives as a free-range chicken in Florida or a stray dog in Latin America. Like a gentle breeze of wind, we ask the breath of God not to just lazily pass us by but to fill our hearts with the grace of God so that we may live and breathe and feel God's love. Let us stand and pray:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

V/. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created.

R/. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, you have instructed the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit. Grant that through the same Holy Spirit we may be

truly wise and rejoice in his consolation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

This is our prayer.

Ven Espíritu Santo llena los corazones de tus fieles y enciende en ellos el fuego de tu amor.

V/. Envía Señor tu Espíritu y todas las cosas serán creadas,
R/. Y renovarás la faz de la tierra.

Oremos.

¡Oh, Dios, que has instruido los corazones de tus fieles con la luz del Espíritu Santo!, concédenos que sintamos rectamente con el mismo Espíritu y gocemos siempre de su divino consuelo. Por Jesucristo Nuestro Señor. Amén.

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