

# The Joy of the Wild Goose

The Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John refers to a “joy.” He says he wants us to have a joy in our lives, and not only that, but also a “complete” joy (Jn 15:9-17). We find this joy through love, and though it may seem odd to the world and to a person without faith, we actually find joy by laying down our lives for others. By being sacrificial and through service.

Yet, in addition to this, the way we find joy is found in the example of St. Peter that we hear in the Book of Acts (Acts 10: 25-48). While Peter was speaking to Cornelius and his friends, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, upon all who were “listening to the word.” This included not only those who already had a level of faith, but also the Gentiles present.

The Holy Spirit was praying in them as they spoke in foreign tongues, and it was only after this that these people were baptized. So Peter found “joy” in the Holy Spirit, through following the Spirit’s inspiration to speak about Jesus. Because of this, his listeners too find joy in his word and a desire for a new faith.

This weekend at the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, several of our youths received the sacrament of Confirmation. We know, of course, that the Holy Spirit was given to us when we were baptized, and is given in a unique way to those who are confirmed. That’s the “order” of how it works in the church.

All of this is true, but what is most interesting for us is that in our day-to-day lives, practically speaking, the Holy Spirit does not always follow the “order” we might think. The Holy Spirit cannot be placed “in a box,” so to speak.

In Ireland, Christians past and present often refer to the Holy Spirit as “the Wild Goose.” The “goose is loose” they’ll say when they speak of the surprising, creative and often spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit. It is like a “wild goose” – unpredictable, yet with a purpose. The inspirations of the Holy Spirit can be like that for each one of us. (There is a great video series, by the way, created by Franciscan Capuchin Father Dave Pivonka called “The Wild Goose,” which is an excellent and recommended teaching on the Holy Spirit.)

There is a subtle but great lesson for us here.

Peter shows us that by *noticing* and *following* the *inspirations of the Holy Spirit* in our lives, *there we find joy*.

Pope Francis says “The Holy Spirit gives us joy. He is the author and creator of joy.” Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. So this gives us pause to ponder: can you think of a time when you felt the Holy Spirit was inspiring you to do something, and you noticed it? And then you actually did it? And do you remember what the result was? The fruits of your action?

While I was praying about this in preparation for this blog, which I adapted from one of my homilies, a recent memory came to mind. I was going to meet someone for dinner in downtown Frederick about a month ago, and I parked on the street not far from St. John’s Catholic Church. Normally when I go to Market Street for dinner I actually walk down Market Street itself. I like it because of all of the shops, restaurants and people and their dogs walking downtown.

But as I was going down the street, I felt “inspired” to walk down a side alley that featured some nice trees, and flowers in bloom around it. When I got down to Church Street and was less than a block from the restaurant, two men came up to me, wanting to talk. So we had a conversation ... and one of them was asking me to pray for him. He was living in a local shelter and asked me if I would pray for him because he had an addiction to alcohol and he was trying to defeat it.

So I listened to him, and encouraged him. Then I asked him if he would like to pray: right there on the street corner. He said yes, and so I laid a hand of blessing on his head and prayed over him, with his friend, right there in the midst of the downtown hubbub. After a simple, sincere prayer with him, I blessed him and gave him a hug, and he thanked me with tear-filled eyes and a smile. Then he and his buddy waved and walked away.

That is a very simple story, but I thought of it when I heard the story of Peter and Cornelius. What if I hadn’t “followed the inspiration” to walk down the side alley? What if hadn’t stopped to talk to the two men and had just kept on walking? I haven’t seen these two since that day, and I pray for them and wonder how they are

doing. But I know that my new friend needed a prayer and a blessing from the priest that day.

This week, consider how the Holy Spirit speaks to you, gives you joy and inspires you to action. What path will he direct you on this week? And who will you find there at the end of it, to give joy, to share your joy with?