



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 5 June 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. The Spirit and the Bride. The Holy Spirit guides. the people of God towards Jesus our hope. 2. *"The wind blows where it wishes". Where there is the Spirit of God, there is freedom*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In today's catechesis, I would like to reflect with you on the name by which the Holy Spirit is called in the Bible.

The first thing we know of a person is their name. It is by their name that we address them, that we distinguish and remember them. The third Person of the Trinity also has a name: he is called the Holy Spirit. But "Spirit" is the Latinised version. The name of the Spirit, the one by which the first recipients of revelation knew him, by which the prophets, the psalmists, Mary, Jesus, and the Apostles invoked him, is *Ruach*, which means breath, wind, air.

In the Bible, a name is so important that it is almost identified with the person himself. To sanctify the name of God is to sanctify and honour God himself. It is never a merely conventional

designation: it always says something about the person, their origin, or their mission. This is also the case with the name *Ruach*. It contains the first fundamental revelation about the Person and function of the Holy Spirit.

It was precisely by observing the wind and its manifestations that the biblical writers were led by God to discover a “wind” of a different nature. It is not by accident that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles accompanied by the “rush of a mighty wind” (cf. *Acts* 2:2). It was as if the Holy Spirit wanted to put his signature on what was happening.

What, then, does his name, *Ruach*, tell us about the Holy Spirit? The image of the wind serves first of all to express the Holy Spirit’s *power*. “Spirit and power”, or “power of the Spirit” is a recurring combination throughout the Bible. For the wind is an overwhelming force, an indomitable force, capable even of moving oceans.

Again, however, to discover the full meaning of the realities of the Bible, one must not stop at the Old Testament, but come to Jesus. Alongside power, Jesus will highlight another characteristic of the wind: its *freedom*. To Nicodemus, who visits him at night, Jesus solemnly says: “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit” (*Jn* 3:8).

The wind is the only thing that absolutely cannot be bridled, cannot be “bottled up” or put in a box. We seek to “bottle up” the wind or put it in a box: it’s not possible. It is free. To presume to enclose the Holy Spirit in concepts, definitions, theses or treatises, as modern rationalism has sometimes attempted to do, is to lose it, nullify it, or reduce it to the purely human spirit, to a simple spirit. There is, however, a similar temptation in the ecclesiastical field, and it is that of wanting to enclose the Holy Spirit in canons, institutions, definitions. The Spirit creates and inspires institutions, but he himself cannot be “institutionalised,” “objectified”. The wind blows “where it wills”; in the same way the Spirit distributes his gifts “as he wills” (*1 Cor* 12:11).

Saint Paul made all of this the fundamental law of Christian action: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (*2 Cor* 3:17), he said. A free person, a free Christian, is one who has the Spirit of the Lord. This is a very special freedom, quite different from what is commonly understood. It is not freedom to do what one wants, but the freedom to freely do what God wants! Not freedom to do good or evil, but freedom to do good and do it freely, that is, by attraction, not compulsion. In other words, the freedom of children, not of slaves.

Saint Paul was well aware of the abuse or misunderstanding that can arise from this freedom. In fact, he wrote to the Galatians: “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another” (*Gal* 5:13). This is a freedom that expresses itself in what appears to be its opposite; it is expressed in service, and in service is true freedom.

We know when this freedom becomes a “pretext for the flesh”. Paul gives an ever relevant list: “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like” (*Gal 5:19-21*). But so too is the freedom that allows the rich to exploit the poor, an ugly freedom that allows the strong to exploit the weak, and everyone to exploit the environment with impunity. And this is an ugly freedom, it is not the freedom of the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, where do we obtain this freedom of the Spirit, so contrary to the freedom of selfishness? The answer is in the words Jesus addressed one day to his listeners: “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (*John 8:36*). The freedom that Jesus gives us. Let us ask Jesus to make us, through his Holy Spirit, truly free men and women. Free to serve, in love and joy. Thank you!

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Cameroon, Australia, Malaysia, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. The feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the memory of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which the Church is getting ready to celebrate in the next few days, remind us of the need to correspond to Christ’s redemptive love, and they invite us to entrust ourselves confidently to the intercession of the Mother of the Lord.

Let us ask the Lord, through his mother’s intercession, for peace. Peace in martyred Ukraine, peace in Palestine, in Israel, peace in Myanmar. Let us pray that the Lord may grant us the gift of peace and that the world will not suffer so much because of wars. May the Lord bless us all! Amen.

I give you all my blessing!

APPEALS

We are passing through this month dedicated to the Sacred Heart. December 27 of last year

marked the 350th anniversary of the first manifestation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. That occasion marked the beginning of a period of celebrations that will end on 27 June next year. This is why I am pleased to prepare a document that brings together the precious reflections of previous Magisterial texts and a long history that goes back to the Sacred Scriptures, in order to re-propose today, to the whole Church, this devotion imbued with spiritual beauty. I believe it will do us great good to meditate on various aspects of the Lord's love, which can illuminate the path of ecclesial renewal, and say something meaningful to a world that seems to have lost its heart. I ask you to accompany me with prayer, during this time of preparation, with the intention of making this document public next September.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our ongoing catechesis on the Spirit and the Bride, we now centre our attention on the Biblical name of Holy Spirit, which in Hebrew is *Ruach*, meaning breath, wind, or spirit. This name highlights the Spirit's profound power and freedom. Jesus likens the Spirit to the wind that blows where it wills, thus emphasizing the freedom of the Holy Spirit, who not only creates and inspires but always remains free, bestowing his gifts "as he wills" (1 Cor 12:11). Saint Paul affirms this, stating: "Now the Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). This freedom is given to us as a gift so that we can do God's will, rather than merely following our personal desires. Where do we attain this freedom of the Spirit, so contrary to the spirit of selfishness? The answer is in the words that Jesus spoke to his followers: "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8:36). Let us ask Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, to make us truly free. Free to serve with love and joy.
