

Breaking Free from the Coop

A popular tale is told of an eagle raised among chickens. Several days after this eagle had pushed his way through the hardened shell, he fell out of the nest that sat upon two large branches and into a chicken coop beneath the tree. He was an orphan in his new family of chickens. One day the farmer noticed the fledgling eagle amidst the chickens and he tried to convince the eagle that he could fly. Even though he felt something within him stir when he looked up and saw a bird flying, he just refused to believe he was anything other than a chicken.

The farmer decided to pick him up and put him on top of a fence and see if the eagle would try to take off. But he just looked down at his safe home with the chickens. The farmer was determined so he brought the eagle on top of the roof of the barn and the eagle looked back down and tried to take off but couldn't because he was afraid. Wouldn't you be afraid, too? Finally, the farmer took him on top of a large hill where he couldn't see the safety of the chickens in their coop, and he took off! Yes, he flew and truly became what God had created him to become an eagle!

When Jesus entered human history by becoming a human being, a great exchange took place. As he shared in our humanity, he gave the entire human family a share in his divinity. That spark of the Divine, begun at baptism, exists in each one of us waiting to ignite



They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagle's wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint. — Isaiah 40: 31

and flame up, allowing our spirits to soar. The call of the Baptist is to become the human beings God wants us to become: a people on a pilgrim journey re-creating the world in which we live. This "re-creation" is given the beautiful image of the wolf and the lamb being friends; the calf and the lion browsing with a child guiding them; a child playing with snakes in their den. Yes, the disorder after the Fall will give way to a beautiful harmony in all of God's Creation.

This grand "re-creation" demands that we remove that which prevents this creative process from unfolding: our pride and cynicism; being comfortable in our secure worlds where the *status quo* pre-

vents the world from expanding; indifference to that spark of the divine within the human heart. Yes, we must "make straight the paths," allowing the Lord an unencumbered entrance into our hearts. It all begins with repentance, a complete turning away from the darkness that keeps us in our coops. Like the eagle, we must realize our true identities as children of God called to share with Christ in transforming the world and all of creation. Our spirits are meant to soar out of the confines of a hardened heart to really see the world, God and ourselves in a whole new way.

We celebrate the life of a man, Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years imprisoned because he had a gospel vision of peace and harmony. After becoming president he brought together Blacks and Whites ending the hatred of Apartheid. A prison couldn't confine that spirit of divinity that was like a fire blazing in the core of his being. He was free within his imprisonment and he allowed himself to remain free after his release when he refused to hate those who were so cruel to him.

Advent is the time to break free from self-made "coops," roll up our sleeves and get our hands and feet dirty with the business of healing, forgiving, peacemaking and building bridges.

— Fr. Frank, Homily, 2nd Sunday in Advent (12-8-2013)