

The Lord, the Giver of Life

We come this week to think about the Lord, the giver of Life – the Holy Spirit. Although it may seem that, after the substantial tranche of the creed given over to describing the person and work of Christ, the section on the Holy Spirit is somewhat cursory, in fact there is plenty to be going on with to help us understand the Spirit's identity and work: The Spirit is *Holy, the Lord, the one who proceeds*, and *is worshipped and glorified* with the other two persons of the Trinity. The Spirit is the *giver of life* and *has spoken* through the prophets. Added to this, we will all, of course, have our favourite image or name to associate with the third person of the Trinity – be it fire, wind or dove; advocate, comforter, or paraclete. Nevertheless, we know that these descriptors are limited, and the Spirit remains for many of us the difficult and rather elusive member of the family. Our comprehension of who the Spirit is partial and often mixed in with popular contemporary notions of spirit and spirituality, which frequently offer more marshmallow than meat.

And yet the Spirit is the one whom we invite and invoke, “Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire”; “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and kindle in us the fire of your love”. The Spirit is the one whose gifts we are graced with, whose fruits we desire to show forth, and in whose power we search for, and are found, by Christ.

It is by the prompting of the Spirit that we arrive here week by week to be nourished by a community of faith which is itself nourished by the bread of life, made so by the sending of the Holy Spirit. And in this kind of way, our thoughts on the person and work of the Spirit are necessarily fluid, circular, reflecting the very nature of the Trinitarian God. And when we come to think about the Spirit we think of action, movement, dynamism... and more specifically the action and movement of love.

The love that flows *between* the three persons of the Trinity – perfect pure love – in which each person of the Trinity is completely and dynamically involved in the life of the other two - reciprocity, mutual indwelling, co-inherence. And the love that flows *out* from God to draw *us* in to intimate relationship. The relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is, as St Bonaventure reflects “supreme mutual intimacy *with mission*” – and that mission is the work of the Lord, the giver of life – forever, flowing out to draw us in that we might have life.

From ancient times, the giving of life – animation if you like - has been associated with spirit in the sense of breath. Living creatures were said to have in them the breath or spirit of life. But in the New Testament the Spirit is the breath of *new* life, the midwife of ‘re-birth’, in which we are made ‘newly alive’. It is by the Spirit that we are enabled to testify that Jesus is Lord. The same Spirit enables us to address God with the name of intimate respect used by Christ, Abba, and it is through the transforming work of the Spirit that Christ's character begins to be formed in each of us and we are enabled and empowered us to live the redeemed life: a life characterised by the giving and receiving of love within families, communities and globally, because we realise that we are all bound up together.

“God gives *all* life...”, says Nicholas Lash; “...is intimate to *every* moment, animates *all* action, fuels freedom... breathes dead bones dancing... *all* life pulsates to the heartbeat of the vivifying Spirit”. May we, then, have the courage to say, today and every day: Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Lord and giver of life, and enliven us, that through your power we may witness to the redeeming and transforming love of God which pulsates through all life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.