

There is a beautiful sentence with which we are all familiar: 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. Travis du Priest, in an essay on the Holy Spirit, tells how he heard a sermon where the priest preaching reversed this and began with 'In the name of the Holy Spirit ...' As Priest noted, it certainly gained the listener's attention!

The preacher was trying to make the important point that it is the work of the Spirit that is the key for us, for it is the Spirit that leads us to the Son, who in turn leads us to the Father. But this is not to say that the Spirit is less than the Son or the Father, or that He is of secondary importance. That would lead to the heresy called Subordinationism. God is One and all Three are Equal.

The Church and Christians generally, tend to shy away from God the Holy Spirit for we are not sure what to make of the Spirit. Like an elderly relative who 'speaks their mind forthrightly and in all circumstances' we want to acknowledge the Spirit's presence and then quickly move on to the next topic.

We may want to refer to a series of biblical quotes which provide information on the Spirit and yes that can be important in defining who this Spirit is and what He does, but equally it can also be a way of keeping God the Holy Spirit safely at a distance. God is reduced to a handful of dry, arid, theological points and is thus made safe to handle. ... or so we think.

It seems to me that our world today, whether it be the secular world or the Church itself, is very fearful and wants to be in control of everything, supposedly in order to keep things safe. The upshot is that a certain rigidity has crept in. Our faith gets reduced to a series of premises that we must believe – it becomes a 'head-trip' rather than a way of life; it becomes knowing 'the rules'; quoting Scripture as 'proof-texts'; either holding on to tradition tightly and not allowing change, or alternatively, like an adolescent with no sense of history, simply throwing tradition out as being irrelevant. All this seems very unhealthy.

I want to suggest another path. We need to take God the Holy Spirit very seriously in our daily life, we need to allow Him (in fact regularly ask Him) to unleash His power in our life, rather than try to hold Him on a short lead. Summed up, we need to be willing to ride God's wild wind to who knows where. It is not by accident that the Celtic symbol for the Spirit is the wild goose.

It can be scary for us, but just as God the Holy Spirit was there at the beginning of creation bringing order out of chaos (Genesis 1.2), so too with

time He can and will bring order out of the chaos of our lives. But it can be an uncomfortable process and we simply have to trust while in the darkness we experience, that He does have our best interest at heart and that in the end 'all will be well' to paraphrase Mother Julian of Norwich.

Some friends are currently working in China and the culture and language there are so very different to ours. They really struggle at times to make sense of what is going on, not just with the important things, but also the minor events in daily life. One friend commented that they just have to see everything (and she meant literally everything) as an adventure. What a good attitude.

It is also true in our relating to the Holy Spirit. We have to see our journey through life with God the Holy Spirit, as an adventure. We have to be willing to let go of our tightly held reins and allow God to be God of our life. We have to be willing to not be in control. We have to willingly allow ourselves to be transformed and loved by God. And we have to accept that God also loves passionately, even the person we struggle to like and accept. And that might just be our very selves!

The Spirit is about transformation – of our world and each one of us. The Spirit speaks into the deepest and darkest recesses of our heart telling of the deep things of God. We don't always want to hear those words, and yet, paradoxically, we really do.

The English priest and author Alan Jones describes the Spirit as 'a swashbuckling adventurer charging into earth, in birth after birth, renewing the world.' As he says, God is willing to risk everything in His great adventure and foray into earth ... And so how will you respond? Will you join Him in this great adventure?

As we respond positively to God's invitation, so we find ourselves beginning to be slowly transformed. Along with God's words to the people of ancient Israel through the prophet Ezekiel, 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' (36.26). These become healing words for each of us today.

But as St. Paul says in his Letter to the Romans, it is not something we can do for ourselves; it is the work of the Spirit: 'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.' (8.26) Our transformation is God's work. Our task is to listen to Him, trust Him and cooperate with His promptings. That takes real courage!