

Please see below Fr Chad's Home Retreat for Saturday 23rd May

What image would you use to describe God? The sun in the sky, not something to look at intently, but something to be grateful for, even when it's hidden by clouds? The friend at my side, walking alongside me, able to listen and guide? The wind in my sails, the unpredictable energy I need, which I cannot control, but which I have to be attentive and sensitive to?

All these images point towards different aspects of the Trinity. Once a year on Trinity Sunday, in a fortnight's time, we acknowledge the fullness of that doctrine, and it is sad we should have to isolate it that way. Do you see the Trinity as an Any Questions panel - which one do I put my prayer to? Which one will help me, is relevant - Father, Son or Holy Spirit? But the Trinity is not three individuals. God is one. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, are not alternatives but an expression of the fullness of God, who creates, redeems, inspires. We always get three for the price of one. But often we short change the Trinity, we do God less than justice, we reduce the fullness of God to just one image. It is the same God, whether we sing 'God our help in ages past', 'Shine Jesus shine', or 'Spirit of the living God'.

This is important in this week leading to Pentecost. Do you find it easy to talk about God as Spirit, the energy, presence, warmth, inspiration of God, expressed in the joy of music and worship? Do you look for your faith to have a tangible effect, to make an emotional difference, to produce growth now. Or – perhaps - you feel a great fidelity and loyalty to the tradition, a love for your saviour, a respect for your creator, but you're uncertain about the future, and therefore uncertain about the Spirit. Like curators in a museum, you know you are guarding something precious, but you're not sure how to hand it on to new generation. The Spirit then becomes an optional extra for those who like that sort of thing. But the unity of God means the Spirit is not optional, and to neglect the Spirit is to impoverish our faith.

This is a genuine challenge for monasteries. The Rule of St Benedict refers to Christ directly 19 times, while the Spirit is mentioned 3 times. There are all sorts of historical reasons for this focus on Christ, but it remains true today that we monks, generally, find it easier to speak of Christ than of the Spirit. Indeed, all those who are attracted to monasteries - whether to join, visit, or to tune in – are often drawn by the sense of community, the body of Christ made tangible, visible, audible, and the sense of order, of peace at the heart of this communal life of prayer and work. Where does this leave the Holy Spirit, the unpredictable wind that blows where it chooses, in this week of preparation for Pentecost?

Well, every day in the Abbey, we sing the 'Veni, Sancte Spiritus', 'Come, Holy Spirit', which describes the Spirit as water, that refreshes and cleanses, and as fire, that warms and purifies. This spring we have seen both. Plenty of hot sun coaxing out new life, and yesterday, some needed rain, the earth embracing the water, a moment of welcome coolness, like the spirit, a sweet refreshing guest. The spirit like rain acts from the outside, not just to refresh, but also to cleanse and heal our wounds. When community dynamics overheat, in monasteries, in families, the sweet coolness of the spirit can renew possibilities for the future, preventing that hardening of attitudes, that nursing of grudges, that takes lockdown to

breakdown. But at other times we need the warmth of fire, working from the inside, not just thawing our icy hearts, but also enabling the craftsman to heat and straighten what is twisted.

When community dynamics cool, in monasteries, in families, the burning desire of the spirit can renew possibilities for the future, preventing that indifference, that cynicism that leads isolation into separation.

In these ways the Spirit can become part of our daily life, not an optional extra. The Spirit is not the fast button on our vacuum cleaner or the turbocharger on our car engine. The Spirit is the breath of God, the breath that made lifeless earth into the first human, the breath that can turn our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. We think of physical life and spiritual life as separate, but our grateful wonder for the breath in us can open us to the full grace of God's spirit. Breathe on me, breath of God.

And so, I think, the Spirit is more about depth than speed. Not so much our own private resource, the energy for our own agenda, giving us the happiness, the success we crave. More the one guiding us slowly into all truth, the one enabling the sacraments, the consecration of bread and wine at Mass, the forgiveness of sins in Reconciliation, the one we invoke to inspire our Lectio, enabling us to bring the Word to the world, just as Mary was empowered at the Annunciation. And it is striking to see how Mary is present with the Apostles in the days of prayer leading up to Pentecost. The glorious mysteries of the Rosary take us with Mary from the Resurrection through the Ascension to Pentecost. Just as Advent prepares us for the birth of Christ, so Eastertide prepares us for the birth of the Church.

And as members of that church, as branches on that vine, we are called to bear the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Often it is the gifts of the spirit that grab the headlines, speaking in tongues, prophesying, things that are publically distinctive. But it is the fruits of the Spirit that bear on our daily life. You may have seen that the theme for this week of Mental health awareness is 'kindness', a choice flowing from a sense in this lockdown of what really matters. The Spirit is for life, not just for Pentecost. This is reflected in our monastic vows. Our vow of stability earths us in the commitment of our Creator, our vow of obedience conforms us to the sacrifice of our Redeemer. But it is our third vow, of fidelity to the monastic way of life, which opens us to the renewal of the Spirit, to make that fidelity possible, a vow which calls us to pray every day 'Come Holy Spirit'.

And I hope this day, this home retreat, you will be able to pray 'come holy spirit', the text of which can be found on the news section of our Abbey website, together with this talk and the following activities I'd like to suggest to you for today.

ACTIVITIES

1. Find five minutes to sit quietly and to focus simply on your breathing. As you breathe in, draw in the Spirit of God, as you breathe out, commend your spirit to God. That mutual breathing, the gift we receive, the response we make.
2. To pray the glorious mysteries of the Rosary, moving from Easter through Ascension to Pentecost with Mary. And then for the final two decades, to invite the Spirit into your relationships, offering a Hail Mary for ten of your close family and friends, and then for ten of your neighbours and colleagues.
3. Take the fruits of the spirit as an examination of conscience, to celebrate what you already contribute, to discern what you still need

Galatians 5

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

4. To spend some time with the following passages from Scripture.

Genesis 2

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Psalm 104

How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your riches. All of these look to you to give them their food in due season. You give it, they gather it up: you open your hand, they have their fill. You hide your face, they are dismayed; you take back your spirit, they die, returning to the dust from which they came. You send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth.

John 3

Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

5. Finally the text I promised, with the Latin for those interested!

Come, Holy Spirit, send forth the heavenly radiance of your light.	<i>Veni, Sancte Spiritus, et emitte caelitus lucis tuae radium.</i>
Come, father of the poor, come, giver of gifts, come, light of the heart.	<i>Veni, pater pauperum, veni, dator munorum, veni, lumen cordium.</i>
Greatest comforter, sweet guest of the soul, sweet consolation.	<i>Consolator optime, dulcis hospes animae, dulce refrigerium.</i>
In labour, rest, in heat, temperance, in tears, solace.	<i>In labore requies, in aestu temperies, in fletu solatium.</i>
O most blessed light, fill the inmost heart of your faithful.	<i>O lux beatissima, reple cordis intima tuorum fidelium.</i>
Without your spirit, there is nothing in man, nothing that is not harmful.	<i>Sine tuo numine, nihil est in homine, nihil est innoxium.</i>
Cleanse that which is unclean, water that which is dry, heal that which is wounded.	<i>Lava quod est sordidum, riga quod est aridum, sana quod est saucium.</i>
Bend that which is inflexible, fire that which is chilled, correct what goes astray.	<i>Flecte quod est rigidum, fove quod est frigidum, rege quod est devium.</i>
Give to your faithful, those who trust in you, the sevenfold gifts.	<i>Da tuis fidelibus, in te confidentibus, sacrum septenarium.</i>
Grant the reward of virtue, grant the deliverance of salvation, grant eternal joy.	<i>Da virtutis meritum, da salutis exitum, da perenne gaudium.</i>