

Pentecost 2019 – Bishop David Wilbourne

You know him because he dwells with you and he will be in you. We get Almighty invisible God only wise: Father, creator, sustainer, supreme judge. We get Jesus: Saviour, Redeemer, Healer, Rescuer, Word made flesh. I'm not sure we get the Holy Spirit. By the time we get to the third person of the Trinity we tend to run out of steam.

So here's a few ideas to fire us up. Fire being the operative word, tongues of fire coming down on the disciples on the first Whit Sunday, enthusing them, empowering humble fishermen with spectacular gifts Suddenly it's The Disciples have got Talent. Or rather, The Disciples have got the Holy Spirit. Bishops wear mitres shaped like flames because they stand in direct line to the apostles, the same spirit enthusing them making them hotheads for Christ.

Another picture is not fire but love, Come Down O Love Divine, seek thou this soul of mine..., The Love that filled Christ's every cell,

The Love that nothing in all creation can separate us from, that purifying Love seeking us out and transforming our brutal darkness with its gentle light. The Spirit is pictured as a dove, Jonah in Hebrew, fluttering over the abyss at the beginning of time as God says let there be light. A church cleaner at Helmsley once read that lesson from Genesis. Her mind was obviously was on other things. Instead of reading God hovered over the abyss she read God hoovered over the abyss. I rather liked that. God's spirit like a 1950s housewife hoovering up our mess of a world and transforming it.

17th Century Bishop of Winchester Lancelot Andrewes is scathing about Christians who decide to get tough, throw off the dove and model themselves on a more robust animal. 'No dove's eye, fox-eyed they; Not silver-white feathers, but party-coloured; no cooing of a dove, but growling of a bear; not the bill or foot of a dove, but the beak and claws of a vulture; instead of an olive branch, a match light or bloody knife in her beak.'

Andrewes muses with savage irony that it would have been 'better if the Spirit had come in some other shape, a Roman Eagle or some other fierce fowl. Clap on Christ a crooked beak, stick him full of eagle's feathers. Force him to do contrary to that he was wont, to that his nature is.' If you open your life to the Spirit, you'll be like a dove. The first Pope, Peter bar Jonah, Peter son of the dove.

Another image is Paraclete which sounds like a sort of bird but actually means Comforter. The lovely Anglican nuns at Whitby, Order of the Holy Paraclete Order of the Holy Comforter. 'Come thou Holy Paraclete and from thy celestial seat send thy light and brilliancy Father of the poor, draw near, giver of all gifts, be here. Come, the soul's true radiancy.'

The loveliest of hymns which I pray every day on my bike. The Holy Spirit, Comforter. The Bayeux Tapestry has a frame called Prince William comforts his troops. He's actually stabbing their bottoms with a sword goading them into battle. Comforter and disturber.

Jesus internalises the model, talks of the Spirit, the Comforter, being in us. A divine chip, competing with all the other programmes which dominate our day, calling and recalling us to be good, to be loving, to be merciful, to be dove-like. Also calling home: ET Phone Home. HS Phone Home. Prayer essentially is the Spirit phoning home. We are rubbish at prayer. We need to shut up, be silent and listen to the Spirit within calling home to our Father in heaven. 'For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.' And just to check you're not into the wrong conversation, how Christlike is the dialogue? If the caller says 'Jesus be cursed,' then pull the plug because you've hooked into the wrong line. Redial for Christ! Limitless calls, limitless time, limitless availability!

What is soiled, make thou pure, what is wounded work its cure, what is parched, fructify. What is rigid, gently bend, what is frozen, warmly tend. Straighten what goes erringly.