

A REFLECTION FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY

PIERS LINLEY OP - THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit can't be pinned down to a single name or image. She is like the wind. He blows where He chooses, whence He comes and whither He goes no one knows. He is God communicating himself, love over-flowing. He is the fountain's spray and bubble. A spring of living water in the hearts of the faithful. The Spirit's portrait is in symbols - The Dove – going forth from the Ark and not returning. Later resting on the Son himself at baptism. He is in the bush, burning not consumed. He is in tongues of fire turning us into prophets lest we be mere dry sticks.

The Spirit is in all things new and fresh. In the sense of wonder that strikes us all too rarely. The Spirit is the beginning – and the end – of wisdom.

The Spirit comes as the mystery of a love both tender and strong. He is our quest, our comforter. He is the Spirit of the Father whose peace Jesus promised us. He is the Spirit of the nameless God who showed himself to Moses as the one who would be whomsoever He chose to be. The Spirit both of the elusiveness and otherness of God and of the intimacy of the Son's friendship. In conversation as familiar as Abraham bargaining for Sodom and Gomorra.

The Spirit is the pledge, the assurance in our hearts. The certainty of harvest that possession of the first fruits brings. He convinces us that we may go forth to sow even when in sorrow, only to find ourselves overtaken by the joy of reapers carrying back their sheaves with joy. So quick does the seed sprout and produce a hundredfold.

The Spirit is the inner instinct of a paradoxical freedom – the light yoke of slavery to His will.

He comes fruitfully – in harvests of patience and peace and in the midst of suffering and strife. For the Spirit's peace is not peace as the world understands it. He is the Spirit of the Son who overturns all worldly standards.

The Spirit is unexpected – yet one hundred percent reliable. Even if more than a hundred percent unpredictable. You can't book an appointment with the Spirit. But the Spirit is always there when needed.

He seals us with an inner instinct whereby we follow him as a duckling imprinted on its mother follows her quacking.

We follow the Spirit's murmur. But sometimes He doesn't murmur but shouts – and that gets difficult. We try to resist the temptation to turn the volume down.

To shelter from the mighty wind rushing. And sometimes He doesn't shout but whispers and in silence we need love-alerted ears.

The Spirit isn't afraid to let come again the chaos and the void over which He hovered at the first creation. So that it is out of nothing that the new earth is re-created.

The Spirit is against – legalism, formalism and stuffiness. – against boredom, prudery and stodginess. He is against fringes and phylacteries and ostentatious posturing. He is against all ecclesiastical pomposity. He is against sin and all resistance to His heaven-ward springing love.

The Spirit is for – daughtership and sonship, liberation and friendship. He is the Spirit of the Son who call us not servant but friends.

The Spirit is the bringer and source of both institution and charism. The creator of inner life of authority and stewardship. But also of rebellion against authority hardened into a false self-image.

The Spirit is the bringer of holy jokes. Of those who take no thought of what to say before their persecutors. He is the Spirit of those who laugh at the place of their martyrdom – at the scaffold steps like Saint Thomas More.

The Spirit is unexpected – yet always there. You cannot prearrange him. Yet you can commit yourself with the hope that he fulfils your rashness.

The Spirit is in sacramental forms – the oil of anointing. Yet calls for a reliance on less certain, more fallible structures to demonstrates that His freedom is unimpaired.

The Spirit is too difficult to hear – yet too easy.

He is secret-yet-revealed power. The hidden-yet-manifested dynamism that drives us through our desert days – His the dry sand. He rejoices with us in our oases – His the sparkling water and the date palm.

He drives us and leads us – going both before and behind to His last work – the shining forth in our hearts and bodies. The transfiguration of our earthly struggles into the glory which He has with the Father and the Son unity. She is for ever and ever.

Amen

(First heard London 1973 – adapted)