

In the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit.

During the past two evenings of Holy Week, we have first focused on “in the name of the father”, and on Tuesday “the son”. So tonight as we complete the trinity – three persons if you like but one God as we come to explore the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, is God’s gift to us – something that is here with us. As a child I used to hear people talk about the Holy Spirit in a vague way. In a way, I find the Holy Spirit the most exciting of the three – abstract – yes, but the images of the Spirit are really something else.

We know we get an interesting insight from a conversation that took place between Jesus and the Jewish Leader Nicodemus. Nicodemus went to Jesus at night presumably to enquire about his teaching – but what he learnt about his teaching he may have preferred not to have known – that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of the Spirit. Water presumably refers to Baptism, and Spirit to the life of God.

But what of the imagery of the Holy Spirit –

The Holy Spirit is often depicted as a dove, based on the account of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on Jesus at his baptism. In many paintings of the Annunciation, for example the one by Rubens, the Holy Spirit is shown in the form of a dove, coming down towards Mary on beams of light, as the Archangel Gabriel announces Christ's coming to Mary

Another image is that of the wind, often used as an image of how the Spirit of God works, “The wind blows wherever it pleases – you hear the sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with the Holy Spirit – you cannot see the wind in fact it is invisible, but you can see its effects.

In Hebrew the word for Spirit and wind is Ruach – which is a hot, rushing desert wind which scattered the sand and made the tall grasses bow as the hot rushing wind went past. Such an image speaks of the power of the spirit, not the soft gentle voice, but the surging impact of the gale.

Another image for me is the famous scene from Godspell – when the voice says, I baptise you with water, but the one who follows will baptise you with the spirit – just at that moment – the band strike into action – and all I saw was the band play – and the tremors pass through the floor and fixtures in the auditorium. Again, invisible, but the effects could really be felt.

Another image is of the idea of breath – so we can think of the spirit of God in terms of a gentle inner voice – whispering the truth of God to us, guiding us, steering us,

As we seek to understand the Holy Spirit, you will no doubt have your own internal image – but what is clear is that the one spirit is working to fulfil the purposes of God in the world and in people in many different ways.

And as we journey through Holy Week together, and reflect on what the disciples must have thought. In the Upper room he told them he was going away – but do they fully understand – they must be wondering what they will do when he is gone, who will lead them, to teach them, to comfort them, to love them. They knew how far they had travelled with him -

It seems that in this hour, Jesus – the one who needed to be comforted - for he was the one facing death, but even in this hour he thought of others not himself. In due course – the Holy Spirit came as they gathered in the Upper room – sound of a rushing mighty wind, bright light filled the house, and tongues of fire sat on each of them.

There are many definitions of the Holy Spirit – some people prefer one based on the imagery – but perhaps one of the best definitions is this “The Holy Spirit is God in the human heart”. The Holy Spirit having equality with the father, and the son. The Holy Spirit is a one of three just as Jesus – the son of God is a person. He is God just as the heavenly father is God. Jesus is not here in the flesh today, but his Holy Spirit is here –taking his place.

So if you hold onto the imagery, where is the Holy Spirit today – he is there, living in the hearts of believers. He sees a weary soul and whispers “Come unto Jesus and rest”. He sees eyes that are filled with tears and wipes them away. He sees the lost soul and offers them words of consolation, and he Conjoins with the Father, and the son in working for the salvation of souls. He is a living being – a divine soul.

In our world today: his gift to us, as we stand here tonight a few days from the great celebration of Easter is that He empowers us for service – just as Jesus came to serve rather than be served – like in the footwashing of the disciples.

You see the power we need does not come from ourselves, but from above. We must serve in his power, or we have no power at all. Just look at this Church – above you are electric lamps. There is no power in lamps, not in the filaments, not in the wiring. Yet, that switch at the back of Church pulled down the Church is flooded with light. The power comes from along way, away – it is this power that provides the illumination.

There is no power in you and me, unless the Holy Spirit is within us. There is no spiritual power in brains, bodies and heart, but in Christ there is great power – if we surrender ourselves to the work of the spirit, he can flood the world with a great spiritual light.

So, perhaps as we journey towards the cross and all that it means, let us ask ourselves two questions: Do you really and truly know him? Does he have an influence in your life? The importance of regular prayer both individually and as a parish can not be understated. The Holy Spirit is not for you or I to use, but a power to use you or I. To put it another way, the question is not How much of him do you have? But How much of you does he have? To surrender completely, will flow spiritual power and blessings for the world.

As we step forward from here, as society searches for “something”, the greatest need of the Church today is to have the Holy Spirit sweeping through its congregations – God in the human heart.

Amen