

“The Spirit of Truth Will Remain with You”

Romans 8:26-27, John 14:15-17

Monday, June 26, 2023 IHM Chapter

*The birds in Nunhead Cemetery begin
Before I’ve flicked a switch, turned on the gas.
There must be some advantage to the light*

*I tell myself, viewing my slackened chin
Mirrored in the rain-dark window glass,
While from the graveyard’s trees, the birds begin.*

In 2007, the Irish poet Maurice Riordan received accolades for his collection of poems *The Holy Land*. The selection I just read from his poem “*The January Birds*” describes unseasonal birdsong in Nunhead Cemetery in the London borough of Southwark. Riordan artfully interweaves a description of singing birds with his own early-morning musings as he peers out at the dawning light and wonders how the birds sustain their hopefulness at the start of each new year.

Antiphonally through the poem, we hear the gentle Christian insistence: *‘there must be some advantage to the light’*.

The imagery of birds in Riordan’s poem naturally evokes for us Christians the Spirit promised in today’s Gospel (*Jn 13:15-21*)

We naturally think of the Spirit as a bird because the Gospels record that at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, the Spirit descended ‘in the form of a dove’.

When I was a boy, I thought the word used to describe the Spirit in today’s Gospel, Advocate or Paraclete, was ‘Parakeet’ - certainly a more colorful version of the dove.

So, the Holy Spirit is usually represented
as a bird in sacred iconography,
not just in images of the Lord's Baptism
but also of the Annunciation, Pentecost, and the Blessed Trinity.
But that's not the only way to represent the Holy Spirit.
Of the classical elements of earth, air, and fire,
tradition has often associated God the Father
with air because He is pure spirit,
God the Son with earth because of the incarnation,
and God the Spirit with fire because
He appeared as tongues of flame at Pentecost (*Acts* ch 2).

That Pentecostal flame filled the cowering apostles with zeal.
He was *fire* in their bellies.
He also gave them words to speak:
He was *light* for their minds, 'the Spirit of Truth'.
It's the light of dawn that gets the birds in Riordan's poem going,
without which they'd never know
another day or year was coming.
It's the spiritual light that makes us 'cry out with joy'
not just at Easter but through the long Easter season
that extends from Easter day till the end of time.

So, the Light of the world, that is Jesus,
did not go out like an empty lamp
when He returned to the Father.
No, it still shines in our world
through the action of the Holy Spirit.
And He, in turn, makes each of us a light for the world,
flames to enlighten the minds
and brighten the hearts of others.
Thus, Jesus' talk today is not just of a promised Spirit
but of the commandments,

the behavior that is love-in-action.
That's how people will see the hope within us:
***“Let your light shine out before others,
that they may see your good deeds
and so, glorify your Father in heaven”*** (Mt 5:14-16).

When Christ speaks today about Spirit and commandment,
light and love, life and truth,
these are not opposites but all of one piece.
To love Jesus is to do what He-who-is-love requires.
Where His Spirit dwells,
it's the excitement of romance, the fire of love.

Truly, ***‘there must be some advantage to the light’***

*Or birds would need the gift of second sight
To sing Another year will come to pass!
The birds in Nunhead Cemetery begin,
There must be some advantage to the light.*

*There must be some advantage to the light.
Indeed!*

***“If you believe me, the Spirit of Truth
will enlighten your minds,”*** says the Lord.
***“If you love me, the Spirit of Love will fuel your hearts.
And so, my commandments of love and truth
will come naturally and supernaturally to you.”***

Sisters, let us, like the saints of old, cry out:
***“We cannot live without the things of the Lord!
We cannot do anything.
But with You, Lord, everything is possible!”***