

The Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life...

We are to imagine a small stirring of sand in the desert. You sit there in the silence with the empty horizon and all seems still. But then by your side this curl of sand, spinning until it enlarges into the full desert wind. Loud. Opaque. The very image of movement and power. This is what the ancient Israelites called the *ru'ach* – and they used the same word for *wind* and *spirit*. The Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, is God in all his turbulent activity of creation and - at Pentecost - recreation.

When *the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep*, it was God the Holy Ghost who moved over the face of the waters and said *Let there be light*. And there was light. Or if you prefer another creation myth, it was the Holy Ghost who set off the Big Bang. The Holy Ghost who impels the particles of light in the solar wind. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of the invisible quarks and neutrinos. There are two accounts of creation in the *Book of Genesis*. And God has given us a third in Joseph Haydn, in his astonishing oratorio *The Creation*.

Imagine again, the *ru'ach*, the creative spirit of God - but this time in Joseph Haydn. There was never such a man so filled with the benign industriousness of the Holy Ghost as Papa Haydn. Up in the morning and praying to the Blessed Virgin, then setting about a big breakfast before, as he puts it, *I sit down at the clavier and begin my search*. Haydn in Vienna when that city was being shelled by Napoleon in 1809, when Beethoven had taken refuge in the cellar. But Haydn stayed in his music room, occasionally going to the piano and playing a few bars of the Austrian national anthem – which was only fair, since he had written it. And not just in his music room, but going out into the streets during the bombardment where the children were crying and picking them up saying, *Don't be frightened children. Where Papa Haydn is, no harm can come to you!*

I can tell you about the Holy Ghost. But if you want the basics of faith, you have to *hear* the Holy Ghost. Get yourself a CD of Haydn's *Creation* and listen to the first part. You will never be so religiously engaged. And I guarantee you will be filled with joy and happiness. *The heavens are telling the glory of God*. But first God has hefty work to do. Or did you imagine it was an easy thing to make the stars? To wrestle with chaos when *the earth was without form and void and darkness upon the face of the deep*?

Haydn depicts that chaos for us in a piece of wandering tonality that would have impressed Arnold Schoenberg. And now for the miracle: *And God said, Let there be light!* And there was light. And there was C-major. And God saw the light, that it was good. And Joseph Haydn saw C-major and behold it was very good. And gave thanks to the Blessed Virgin. Then God and Joseph Haydn made the animals and the trees and the fish – especially the funny fish. If you want first hand experience of the Holy Ghost in operation, get thee to Haydn and the first part of *The Creation*. Here is the composer working hard and having fun. Here is the Holy Ghost working hard and having fun. And God laughed, and the evening and the morning were every day.

God the Holy Ghost takes possession of human beings. This is what happened to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. They are filled with wild exuberance and spiritual intelligence. There are some people today who claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit – when they have only the wild exuberance without the spiritual intelligence. So you see why the gospels have this terrible saying about blasphemy against the Holy Ghost as the only unforgivable sin? Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is possible. It was there in the stoning of the prophets. It is there in the rejection of art in favour of anti-art. It is there in the debauched educational theory – and practice, alas! – which says that *creativity* can occur without hard effort. This is the satanic rubbish that has impoverished a whole generation of schoolchildren encouraged to *express themselves*.

There is no inspiration and no creation without hard work and pain. Ask Haydn as he went after breakfast in trepidation to pray to the Virgin for help with composition. Ask God the Holy Ghost as he brooded over the primeval chaos before *the morning stars could sing together and all the sons of God shout for joy*. St Paul tells us what inspiration, creativity and life are like: *the whole creation groaneth in travail*. That's what you have to do to make something. That's what God did.

And behold, God saw the heavens and the earth, the work of his fingers and saw that it was very good. There is a vast exuberant joy in the hard work of creation and the joy comes through seeing that the job has been done right. *God saw that it was very good.* And it's the same with what we make and do here and now. Here is the sign of the presence of the Holy Ghost. He made the whole universe and humankind as one little speck of being. But the glorious bit – you must see it as the funny bit – God inspired this little man so that in his creative and inventive work he could encapsulate the whole universe. This is what the great work of artistic creation does. Here is *The Eroica*. Here is *The Divine Comedy*. Here is the painting of *The Last Judgement*. And in such as these, little human beings are inspired to capture a vision of the whole creation.

To only a few is it given to be great artists. But we are all called to join in the creative work of the Holy Ghost. We do it by doing our best. Supremely we do it by being towards God – turning our whole being perpetually towards God as the flower turns up to the sun. We do it by forbearing, forgiving and loving one another for God's sake. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles were one in the Spirit. This gift is for us also. To rejoice in the fellowship that God has given us here. Go on – be as exuberant about it as the Spirit inspires you! And as intelligent.

And what else does the Holy Ghost do for us? Well, Blaise Pascal said *The whole trouble with mankind is that we can't sit quietly in our own room for half an hour*. We find ourselves, as Eliot said, *distracted from distraction by distraction*. Look at our human condition. It is astonishing – and literally *dispiriting* – to see just how restless and discontented we are.

We spend our time looking back with a mixture of regret and nostalgia and looking forward with a further unproductive mixture of hope and anxiety. I'm not even talking about long term. Whatever we're doing, we so often find ourselves looking to find our satisfaction and happiness in what we're going to do *next*. This morning may be the tedium of the Rector's sermon – but cheer up in an hour it will be lunch! Or we look forward to the weekend and when it comes we're undecided, preoccupied and listless,

annoyed with ourselves precisely for wasting our time being discontented. Feeling dissatisfied because we're not feeling as satisfied as we think we ought to be feeling. Even a woman working her morning serving in a café will look forward to the bus ride home. But when she's on the bus, her mind will fly ahead to the pleasant walk from the bus stop to her front door. And on this little walk, she'll be thinking about the cup of tea and chocolate biscuit she's going to have when she gets in. Occasionally, her anxiously postponed pleasures will be interrupted by the knowledge that her freedom is curtailed: she will have to collect the children at four o'clock.

Thus we waste our lives uncreatively, dispiritedly by not living in the present. What the Holy Ghost enables us to do is to live content in the reality of *now*. The Holy Ghost is the mediator of the sacrament of the present moment. This is why the Holy Ghost is called *the Lord, the Giver of Life. Now is the acceptable time and now is the day of salvation*. The Holy Ghost is the God of joy in the present moment. I should say, *The Holy Ghost is the time of your life*.