

Sunday Message from Fr William for the Thirty-First Sunday of the Year 2023

The 'Other World' continued

'Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the earth. Then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.' (*Genesis 2*). Human beings are a coming together of heaven and earth: the 'dust from the earth', albeit taking a highly complex biological form, and the Spirit from the 'other world', the 'breath of life', breathed into them. This, in the *Genesis 2* narrative, is what makes Man fundamentally and qualitatively different from the other animals.

The mainstream Christian view, especially among biblical scholars, is that *Genesis 2*, along with the first 11 chapters of *Genesis*, is not intended as a scientific or historical account. It's given as a story that answers the big theological questions that probe beyond the reaches of scientific endeavour: Who is creating the universe? What does it mean to be a human being? What is the relationship between creature and Creator? How are we to account for the existence of both good and evil?

These early chapters of *Genesis* can be taken to be 'foundational', not in the sense of a historical event that happened a long time ago, but in the sense that we need to keep coming back to these chapters if we are to understand what it means to be a human being (*cf Matthew 19:8*).

The coming of the Spirit into human beings is in fact a historical reality: a historical event and a historical process. Many of the books of the Bible, taken together, give us the great lead up, spanning centuries, to the coming of the Spirit.

Joel 3: 'I will pour out my spirit on all mankind...' (approx.. 835 BC)

Ezekiel 37: The prophetic vision of a valley of bones, waiting for the breath of life to be breathed into them. (approx. 570 BC)

John 7: 'Jesus stood there and cried out: "Let the man come and drink who believes in me!". He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive.' And then this, the fulfilment of all these prophetic words:

'When Pentecost day came round...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.' (*Acts 2*).

It's the historical carrying through of Man's creation, corresponding to the theological blueprint of *Genesis 2*: 'Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the earth. Then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.'

The story doesn't end there. Each individual needs to be filled personally with the Spirit. The work of creation is ongoing. And for each individual the Spirit is breathed into him or her as an ongoing and lifetime infusion. Our capacity to be filled with the Spirit is increased by our openness to Him, by our desire for Him, by our explicit invitation to Him. For Christians the infusion of the Spirit is associated particularly with the Sacrament of Confirmation, but is in no way limited to one particular moment in a person's life, nor to a particular point in history, whether before or after Pentecost, and cannot be limited in any way. The ways of the Spirit are infinite.

And that's all just in this world. *to be continued*



Sunday 5 November 2023