

# Along the track

## The Gift of the Spirit

I read this story many years ago: An elderly Cherokee brave told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. The battle, he said, is between two wolves inside us all. One is evil, it is anger, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, kindness, hope, humility, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The boy asked his grandfather, which wolf wins. The one you feed, the grandfather said.

Jesus told us that he would not leave us as orphans but rather leave us with the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are seeds within us – they grow when we use them or not, feed them, nourish them.

St Paul wrote very eloquently about the gifts of the Spirit and with some passion. We are living in the spirit, he wrote when, in our lives, there is “charity, joy, peace, patience, endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, chastity, gentleness, forgiveness, patience.” (Galatians, 5)

But, like the story of the Cherokee, the gifts of the Spirit are dependent upon what we do about them. We have received ‘the gifts of the Holy Spirit’ not so we might become supernatural but so that we might become better human beings and because of how we put these gifts into action, so that the world we live in might become a better place. Each day the Spirit invites us to a new beginning; each day the Spirit invites us to live more deeply.

When we are in contact with the Spirit within, there is an outwardness, a generosity of spirit, a respect for others. The Spirit calls us to be generous, to be curious, to be faithful and compassionate. The Spirit is at work when we show love and compassion, when we are curious, when we look beyond the physical creation to see and experience this deeper level of life.

Spirit can be so life giving, encouraging, inspiring but at other times a pest – The Spirit is always restless, urging us on. God is often calling through the Spirit’s work within us when in St Paul’s words, the Spirit groans within us.

We can feel the gist of the Spirit sometimes in our restlessness, uneasiness or dissatisfaction. Is this what I am meant to be doing, where I am meant to be? We can experience the Spirit in the painful experiences of struggle, in questions that keep surfacing and nagging at us, sometimes in a yearning for justice. St Augustine wrote about our restless hearts, a realisation sometimes that things should not be this way and I need to do something about it.

There are other times, however, when there can be a sense of contentment and peace, often quite unexpected. The Spirit can be sensitive to our needs.

Every now and then we have to take a good long look at what gives us heart, what touches our soul. Doesn’t it surprise you sometimes what you said or what you did. Do you ever think where did that come from? Why did I say that? Or do that? Just the right word at the right time.

Or we might look at when the gifts of the Spirit are not at work, that we are not in touch with them. If we are not led by the Spirit, we begin looking inwards, we become the centre of importance – it’s all about me. People and things are there for our use and bickering, dissention and rivalries emerge, we become envious, jealous of others, we become judgmental, hostile to others.

We can see excesses in their many forms, putting down others, gossiping, an inability to listen to others or show empathy or understanding, even the abuse of power, exploitation of others, and outbursts of rage and temper. Without the Spirit, we put ourselves at the centre of everything and everyone and everything is at our disposal – we don’t seem to be able to moderate our behaviour or so we see sexual harassment as acceptable, there is little respect for the gifts associated with our gender.

The gifts of the Spirit are extraordinary, they are about life, about building family, community because we want this world to be a better place. The gifts urge us to think about what drives us, what brings us peace, what gives us purpose.

When you look around, who inspires you most? Why?

Regards  
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