

It has often been said that pets become more like their owner – or is it the other way round? Whichever way you take it, what is meant is that the long term association, the long term companionship has its effect in affecting change in one party or the other.

I leave you to ponder that deep philosophical point and ask a very different question, ‘Why do we do what is right?’

I am not saying that we do the right thing – because we don’t. But the thing is we know when we have done wrong and we generally feel bad about it (even if for reasons of pride we try not to show it.)

There is planted deep within us an awareness of right and wrong which we would call conscience. It is not just an individual thing. Different religious and national traditions have ethical codes that will certainly differ but will show remarkable similarities to one another.

The Revised Catechism of the Church of Ireland (which regrettably was not printed in the current edition of the Prayer Book), in talking of the Holy Spirit, makes two important points.

First – the Holy Spirit inspires all that is good in mankind. The writer of Genesis, in the second of the two Creation narratives, tells of God forming man from the dust of the ground, breathing into his nostrils the breath of life and man becoming a living being. In our Gospel reading on this Day of Pentecost we read of Jesus, on the day of resurrection, in the upper room breathing on his

disciples and saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’. We have this picture of each of us, made in the image of God, having something of the breath, the Spirit of God, moving us, inspiring us.

The second point the Catechism makes – the Holy Spirit enables me to become more like Christ. At this point I just want to reflect on Jesus’ teaching in the Upper Room on the night before he died. ‘As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love.’

Why, I asked earlier, do we do the right thing? Yes there is that basic feeling for right and wrong that we share with all humanity, the impulse of conscience. But there is more to us than gut reaction, however divinely inspired. What about those selfless acts of love and service that have touched our lives. As I speak you may recall occasions on which you have benefited from the love and generosity of others, maybe when sickness or tragedy struck your life, or life was just difficult and someone saw your pain and just reached out in love.

Returning to Jesus’ teaching in the upper room, John tells us of Jesus saying to his disciples, ‘This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.’ Our love, our concern, our service for one another should mirror something of his love for us; should have something of that same self-giving, self-forgetting, cross centred love that we find in Jesus.

To go back for a moment to those occasions when you have experienced the love and generosity of spirit of another in a time of need – a time when Christ

touched your life, when Christ ministered to your need. The Holy Spirit enables us to become more like Christ.

This takes me back to that deep philosophical point concerning owners becoming more like their pets – or whichever way round it is. It is all about the time we spend with each other.

The more time we spend with Christ, the more we consciously seek his presence, the more we seek his will and purpose in our lives – as we do so the more we come to recognise something of the height, the depth, the length, the breadth of the love of God for us in Christ, the more we seek to make our own response of love.

Why, I asked at the outset, do we do what is right? Returning to Jesus' teaching on the night before he died, 'You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer but I have called you friends. You did not choose me but I chose youto go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.'

What we are talking of here is an intertwining of love and obedience. An obedience, and adherence to what is right, that has its roots in love. A love that has its outpouring in obedience to a God who has loved us in Christ. may we, in our daily walk with God be enabled by the indwelling Spirit of God to grow in our likeness of Christ as we respond in daily living to his self giving love.