

Shortly after our older son, Anthony, was born I remember talking to Cecil Wilson, who was the Rector of Raheny when I was there as Curate. His two children had both been adopted. He recalled coming across his son Geoff when he was a teenager, standing in the garden of Mountmellick Rectory, looking over a hedge at some horses in a neighbour's field. Geoff always loved horses – he sensed it was in his blood. As his father came up to him he said, 'I don't belong here – I should have been on a farm looking after those things.'

As with many adopted children, Geoff had a deep rooted desire to know where he came from, part of his yearning to discover who he really was.

As I reflected on the lessons appointed for today, the Feast of Pentecost, my thoughts came to focus more and more on the role of the Holy Spirit in discovering who we really are.

The Bible the Creation narratives convey the fundamental truth that we are made in the image of God; that we are, in a very real sense, children of God. Alongside that, the story of the Fall conveys a second fundamental truth that man loses touch with that identity. Man seeks his identity, his security in many lesser identities – in nationality, in social class, in accumulating wealth, in career.

These may be of more obvious immediate concern but they do not answer that fundamental question, 'Who am I?' My national identity is important; my social standing, the material comfort of myself and my family are of concern.

But they have no bearing on that fundamental question of ‘Who am I before God?’

God created me, God acted to redeem me in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In that encounter I come to see God as the very source of my being, Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in my life.

The Fourth Gospel tells us of Jesus, as he shared that last meal with his disciples, promising them that the Father ‘will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth.’. In that same narrative Jesus speaks of the work of the Spirit as one that would lead them into all truth, one that would remind them of everything he taught them.

In the portion set for the Epistle this morning, Paul speaks of the role of the Spirit in leading us into an awareness of our fundamental identity as children of God. It is, he argues, by the Spirit that we come to acknowledge God as ‘Abba, Father’. It is by the Spirit that we realise our identity as children, heirs and co-heirs with Christ. And here comes the crunch, so to speak. ‘if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.’ This speaks to me of the importance of our lives reflecting something of the life of Christ; that our very lives should bear the mark of, should bear witness to, the death and resurrection of Jesus; something of a dying to self and living for Christ, in which

It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. *Gal 2:20*

I was born into a human family. As I grew up I came to enter upon what it meant to be a member of the Brew family. I was born into a particular national identity. Even though I have lived in Ireland for more than two thirds of my life, I retain my English identity, valuing its history, its traditions and the contribution it has made to the wider world.

But, as I have been reflecting on this morning, that is only part of the story. I am still left looking over the proverbial hedge, like the adopted son of my Rector, asking ‘Who am I?’ That ultimate identity rests not on my membership of a particular family, nor my national and cultural identity, precious as both of those are to me. My ultimate identity lies in Christ, in acknowledging him, and no other, as Lord and committing what time is left to me to his service.

That is the work of the Spirit, whose coming on the Church on that first Pentecost we remember this day. The Spirit leads us into all truth, truth about ourselves, truth about Christ, in whom there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. The Spirit is the one who strengthens guides and inspires us in his service until the time comes when we shall know even as we are fully known.