

Whenever you go to the surgery the doctor will often take out the stethoscope, plonk it on your chest and say, ‘Breathe in, out, in again – that’s grand.’ Those of you who sing in a choir know the importance of breathing – get it wrong and you end up gasping at the end of a verse of a hymn. Any runners among you know the same thing. Get the breathing right and you are fine – get it wrong and you end up leaning over a wall gasping for breath.

Breathe in, breathe out.

What got me on to this line of thought you may ask? I begin with the portion of our Epistle, which in the translation we use, reads ‘All scripture is inspired by God.’ The word in the original text that we translate as ‘inspired by God’ (qeovpneusto" – ‘theopneustos’) means literally ‘God breathed’

That set me thinking about breathing and the references to breathing or breath in the Bible. Breath, and particularly the breath of God is associated with life. In the second account of creation in Genesis we read:

‘then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.’ *Genesis 2:7*

In this account, man, alone among the rest of creation, is imbued with the breath of the divine, marking him out from the rest of the animal kingdom. One made for fellowship with God, for partnership with God.

Just as the breath of God is associated with life, so the absence of breath is associated with death. And so later on in Genesis we read

Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.  
*Gen 25:8*

Words reminiscent of Jesus on the cross:

<sup>50</sup> Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and  
breathed his last. *Matt 27:50*

Then we read in John's Gospel, after the Cross, after the resurrection, in a scene reminiscent of that early chapter of Genesis, the risen Christ appears to the disciples and offers words of peace:

<sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to  
them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. *John 20:22*

All these situations are God-breathed in which God's breath gives life, gives meaning, gives power.

Man, formed from the dust of the ground.

Words written by very human characters such as David and Paul.

A group of men broken by their experiences of Calvary, their feeling of failure.

So far so good. But then I find myself asking, to what extent can I look upon myself as God breathed? First and foremost I am a human being, made in the image of God. So even in my brokenness I show something of the divine. But what of the continuing influence of the Spirit of God? What is the role of God's breath, God's Spirit in the life of the Church, in the life of the individual?

To begin with, God continues to breath, to inspire in and through the Scriptures. For this to impinge on me, I must be prepared to engage with the Scriptures which are themselves a story of an engagement of faith, as succeeding writers grapple with issues of faith, what it is to be the people of God, issues of suffering, of failure, of judgement and redemption. It has been said that I must not just read the Bible, I must allow the Bible to read me; I must, in the words of the Collect for next Sunday be prepared to:-

‘hear them,  
to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them  
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,  
we may embrace and for ever hold fast  
the hope of everlasting life,  
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,

Breathe in, breathe out. We begin to be changed by what we read.

What is to be the mark of a life that is changed, what is to be the mark of a God-breathed life? A good starting point is to be found in the Revised Catechism:

**11 What does the Church teach about God the Holy Spirit?**

The Church teaches that God the Holy Spirit inspires all that is good in mankind; that he came in his fullness at Pentecost to be the giver of life in the Church, and that he enables me to grow in likeness to Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit enables me to grow in likeness to Jesus Christ. Enables each one of us to be ones through whom and in whom Christ is not just made known, but made present in the world of today; made present in our homes, our neighbourhood, our places of work and recreation.

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
until my heart is pure;  
until with thee I will one will,  
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
till I am wholly thine;  
until this earthly part of me\_  
glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God:  
so shall I never die,  
but live with thee the perfect life\_  
of thine eternity. *Hymn 293 (C of I Hymnal)*