

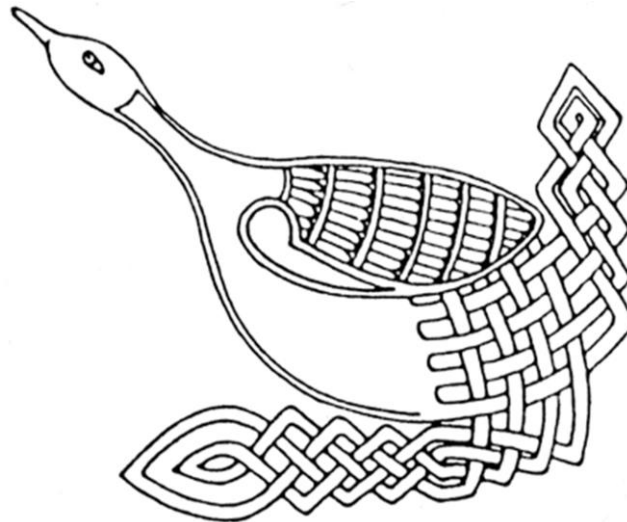


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# Wild Geese instead of Doves

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Gladly and frequently we are called upon at Pentecost to gather, unified in prayer, like the people in the room of the first Pentecost. We should pray for the Spirit to come and then open ourselves to his gifts, his guidance and his illumination. »Wonderful«, we say, »that is how Pentecost works.«

Not really! In the room in which the first believers gathered, no one called upon the Spirit, no one uttered the petition: »Come, Holy Spirit«, and no one was open to his gifts, his guidance and his illumination. This was due to the simple fact that no one was expecting him because no one had invited him.

Naturally, we can invite the Spirit and welcome him from the heart. But that is not the exercise of Pentecost.

»Then suddenly from heaven there came a great wind,  
as when a mighty storm comes,  
and filled the entire house in which they were.«

The true exercise of Pentecost is to deal with the Spirit when he breaks into our lives unexpected and uninvited. The tame Church practice of invitation is not the same thing as the struggle with the wild Spirit of our God. Invitation is controllable, formable, and easy to limit (when, where, who and how long). Surprises are wild, untameable unforeseeable, spontaneous and not easy to control.

When the Celtic people's accepted the Christian faith, they were enthused by the theology of the Holy Spirit. But they could not accept the classical image of the Spirit, namely, the dove. And for good reason! After the chicken, the dove is the most domesticated bird in the world. And why are they domesticated? They are bred to carry our messages. The Celtic Christians chose the wild goose as the image of the Spirit, because they are loud, irritating, they make themselves noticeable, land where they will and are absolutely unpredictable. Pentecost was originally the experience of dealing with a wild and untameable God. What we have almost completely lost sight of is the fact that our God is a God of surprises. And while all the surprises of God are life giving, they are not all pleasant.

Here I have been greatly influenced by John O'Donohue. We sat with him in a wild landscape of limestone with a view of the ocean. There, and not in a church or a lecture hall, he wove the importance of the wildness of God into our hearts. He told us, that the social conventions tame and control us not just externally, but that they exercise a great influence on our interior lives as well. If we permit it, they transform the greatest adventure in the universe (our life) into a program of fixed social expectations. But when we experience the wildness of heart created by the Spirit, then we need to leave behind this domestication. The Spirit leads us back to our original wildness, to the natural, seamless flow of our innermost nature. New worlds appear and we are invited to tread new, original and possibly risky paths in our lives.

Let us take the story seriously. The Spirit overshadows the disciples, but does not shower down information upon them. He does not deaden them with instructions and descriptions. He merely initiates them into a new situation. While his situation is unfolding, the disciples deal with their questions and the possibilities of the new situation, and very gradually new revelations open themselves. Yet, such revelations never befall us suddenly. The Spirit brings neither Canon Law nor the Catechism into the Upper Room. The knowledge of the the disciples gradually spouts in them. The knowledge born of the power of the Spirit develops step by step. Those are filled with the Spirit refuse to walk on worn out paths. The well known maps do not satisfy them. The power of the Spirit urges them forward, crosses over familiar boundaries and returns to report of regions where no cartographer ever set foot.

The mighty storm of the Spirit creates wildness in His people.

»All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign tongues,  
as the Spirit gave to them.«

New language, new words, new speech is the consequence. The Spirit of God has no patience with mere repetition. The worn out, long irrelevant explanations and interpretations are unmasked and their banality no longer offers us refuge.

The talk here is of tumult, wind and mighty storms. It speaks of that which is loud and hard to overlook, of that which draws attention to itself and does not simply disappear from the stage. When the Spirit moves, people are more interested in what could yet be than for that which has always been.

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