

Encountering the Holy Spirit

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“Leaving Your Spirit ‘till the work on earth is done”. So goes the chorus of “There is a Redeemer” by Melody Green, taking inspiration from the words of Jesus at the time of His Ascension (John 14:16-17). And, as St Paul reminds us, there are “varieties of service” (1 Corinthians 12:5).

Throughout my working life as a social worker and therapist, I have wanted to be confident that what I put my energies into, is what I am meant to be doing - a service which best draws on the abilities I have been given. I prayed daily for my work and before each encounter. I recognised that when people who are struggling with difficulties let me into their lives I was standing on holy ground. I prayed that the work I was doing would be protected and that His love would prevail.

A time came when I became passionate about a particular approach to the work I was doing. This led to me becoming involved in new activities – generating a community of colleagues who shared my passion, writing, producing a newsletter, organising annual events for people to learn from each other. Whilst it had been quite easy to be confident that my work with families would be what Jesus wanted of me, I frequently needed to ask in prayer about these new activities, especially when they took up more and more of my spare time. I never heard “No” and continued taking on new responsibilities, offering these as opportunities for the Holy Spirit to be at work.

Throughout my working life, the Eucharist has been a vital opportunity to encounter God and receive Jesus in communion. In the Catechism we read that “The Holy Spirit is like the sap of the Father’s vine which bears fruit on its branches” (1108). Looking back, I am struck by the extent to which the Holy Spirit kept me going in work that was at times challenging and, thanks be to God, often fruitful.

We usually go through life not knowing what others are noticing about us. I was especially blessed when I came to retire and work colleagues gathered to acknowledge my contribution to the service we delivered. I was pleased to hear one colleague comment on the efforts I had made to engage with families who had no choice in being involved with our service, and for understandable reasons mistrusted professionals. I was surprised when he then went on to comment on the influence of my faith on my work. The saying “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words” as attributed to St Francis, serves to remind us that as Christians in a workplace our faith can be more visible than we might think, through what we do and say and through what we don’t do and don’t say.

And now I find myself as coordinator of the Diocesan Service of Communion. It took me a while to notice that those new activities I had engaged in in my working life had prepared me for what I appear to have now been called to do. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I trust and pray that it is.