

Blog – 14th Oct. 22.

Communion with God.

Over the last few weeks I have been reading “A History of Ireland.” by Jonathan Barton. It has 250 short bite-sized chapters, which takes us on a journey, quite literally from the last Ice Age to 1965. The further I got into the book the more I realised that God was taking me on a journey, not just through a historic horizontal timeline, but also beyond the book into gaining an increasing understanding of the vertical – into what was taking place, chapter by chapter, in the heavenly realms and into the heart of God. Truly, our battle is not just ‘us’ versus ‘them’, “*against flesh and blood*” but also “*against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*” Ephesians 6:12 NIV.

More recently, God has brought me back to something He showed me during my Christian Renewal Centre days, from Romans Ch. 8. He invited me, regarding a particular issue, to “embrace the groans” – all three of them!

In it we read, “*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies... In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*” (vs. 22-26 NIV)

1. The groan of creation – it has been all around us ever since ‘the fall’ in Genesis 1: in wars, Covid, abortion and other moral/ethical issues, ethnic strife...
2. The groan we experience as we personally interact with creations groan. It shows us our own frailty/inadequacy; our inner reactions/responses; the ongoing need of a Redeemer.
3. Our deep spirit connectedness with God, with His Holy Spirit within us. The capacity to share in His pain for the groan in creation, around and within us.

The first two of these are clearly seen as the chapters of the book unfold: the introduction of the Empire Spirit into Ireland by Henry II and the Papacy in the mid-1100s – subjecting the Irish tribes to English Catholic rule and the demise of the Celtic Church; the subsequent development of this, before and after the Reformation by both Church and State; the Reformation bringing with it the entrance of sectarianism; land removal of the Irish people by both Catholic and Protestant reigning systems, including genocide; partition, “the troubles” and the current issues surrounding a Border Poll.

What is not considered in the book is the third “groan.” Something I was reflecting on before last weeks Sunday Service began. We had a guest speaker from Nashville – Dan Wilt. He spoke on three aspects of prayer – asking God, conversing with God and communion with God. It was this last aspect that grabbed my attention. In our growing relationship with Him, He wants us as His children to be in that mutual place of communion, which speaks of intimacy. He not only wants us to have a close personal conversation with Him, but He actually wants, longs for, us to be able to share with us what is on His heart.

It is there, that God examines our hearts and cuts through the wrong historic interpretations and associated cultural baggage we carry: how we have, often over centuries, built up our tribal perceptions of the 'other'; evolved our national identity into becoming the worship of the idols of either Irish/Catholic or Protestant/Unionist nationalism and most importantly it's where we feel God's pain and grief regarding what we have done to each other, often in His name. Out of this comes ownership, repentance, reaching out to learn more accurately how others have experienced what we inflicted on them. Out of this a profoundly deeper level of reconciliation flows! It's primary a journey into the heart of God. I am of the increasing conviction that this is were God wants to take us as His Church in Ireland. This is an integral part of embracing 2 Chron. 7:14, and the healing of the land. I invite you to prayerfully read:

