"It is the lowly heart that understands." Liturgy of the Hours

I live in a city called the "Windy City", Chicago. Air easily suggests itself to me as I believe it would for anyone in Spred, catechists and those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Air is a resource for Method Vivre catechesis as are the other basic elements, Water, Earth and Fire. Still we are not always alert to think about air as grist for catechesis.

Wind speaks to the velocity of air. The city of Chicago sits on the southwest tip of Lake Michigan. In the winter the wind comes down from Canada and brings cold air across the water and frequentlyumps snow upon the inhabitants. The air whips through the city at times from east and west, taking down power lines, damaging roofs, even felling trees. The leaves in the trees rattle and twist in the air. Yet wind need not only be destructive but also helpful and comforting, as when it is artificially produced by way of a fan, producing a movement of air, or cooling it by way of an air conditioner, or heating it by way of a furnace, or fire place. To this day, some prefer to hang their laundry outside to dry because open air brings a fragrance of freshness to the clothes instead of tumbling them in an air heated dryer. Hair dryers are simply blowing hot air to hasten a task. Sometimes we are caught in a draft, a current of air that soothes or annoys.

Air is the mixture of invisible odorless tasteless gases (as nitrogen and oxygen) that surround the earth. It is hidden - often like our friends, unseen. Yet it is also translucent and can transmit color and sound. Some love to huff and puff and blow out the flame on a candle in the celebration room - why does it flicker and flutter in the air except for a light gentle breeze. Even the Spred logo evidences that fitful fluctuating motion. Happily we know it is spring when colorful and oddly shaped kites begin to fill the sky. There are sad connotations too when a nurse says the patient stopped breathing at 3:20 p.m. Even the expression, the person "expired," i.e. the spirit, the breath has left. The reaction can be a sigh, a deep audible breath or a gasp, catching one's breath convulsively and audibly, or to "lose one's breath." "Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last." (Mark 15:37)

Then there is the whole field of aerodynamics. For example, the airplanes we see or perhaps hear in the sky. It is a fixed-wing aircraft heavier than air that is driven by a propeller or by a high velocity jet and supported by the dynamic reaction of the air against its wings. The action facilitates world travel. Think of our lungs. Children try to hold their breath as long as they can. They cannot do it for long. Medicine and hospitals require air continuously. Surgical operations control it. "Pneuma" is Greek for air, breath, spirit. Pneumonia needs to be addressed to restore
proper respiration or there could be lethal effects.

Meteorology is a science that deals with the atmosphere and its phenomenon and especially the weather. Weatherpersons are messengers but frequently we want to blame them for severe cold, warmth, storms, rains, hurricanes - cyclonic winds of 75 miles, or the violent destructive whirling wind of a tornado.

What has Air got to do with Spiritual Development? Everything frankly, because we all live in it. We believe in the inductive method, beginning with the experience of a person and then seeing how prevalent this reality is in the life of Jesus and in the Liturgy and Scripture.

The poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins* wrote about air. In a long poem I select his initial evocation of air and its relationship to himself - and then I select later another short passage when he sees another relationship of that element not only to himself but also to the being and action of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Wild air, world-mothering air,
Nestly me everywhere,
That each eyelash or hair
Girdles; goes home betwixt
The fleeciest, frailest-fixed
Snowflake; that's fairly mixed
With, riddles and is rife
In every least thing's life;
This needful, never spent,
Nursing element:
My more than meat and drink,
My meal at every wink;
This air, which, by life's law,
My lung must draw and draw,
Now but to breathe its praise,
Minds me in may ways
Of her...

Be thou then, O thou dear
Mother, my atmosphere;
My happier world, wherein
to wend and meet no sin;
Above me, round me lie
Fronting my foreward eye
With sweet and scarceless sky;
Stir in my ears, speak there
Of God's love, O live air
Of patience, penance, prayer
World-mothering air, air wild,
Wound with thee, in thee isled,
Fold home, fast fold thy child.

WHERE
IT COMES
FROM

This action of seeing another level of creation as a manifestation of God's presence and his love for us (or in this case, the Blessed Virgin Mary) is what a Spred catechist does whether in an adult preparation session or in a total community session with our friends.

There is a certain mindless fusion within a person, not simply a metaphorical experience. Hopkins refers in the title to this poem as a comparison between air and himself or between air and the Blessed Virgin Mary. This use of the word comparison is appropriate for his time, but I think it is more than a comparison. God and the world are not identical nor separate, but can be experienced together. In Hopkins' poem, Air is not like Mary, or Mary is not like Air. Rather, symbolically, Mary becomes Air, Air becomes Mary.

Such consciousness means humbly living in the truth of things, or the prayer of things. How many
opportunities there are for one to turn signs into symbols, to behold other levels of being affected by reality - all of which lead to the mystery of God's presence. It is the mysticism of everyday things. When there is stillness in us, we allow the mystery to come at us. This occurs with the catechists and our friends through the process of evocation. The catechist focuses on the details of a thing before us, or we recall the experience of doing so, and slowly draw others, ourselves and our friends into that experience. We are one in the experience of Interiorization.

In the Liturgical evocation we ask, how could there be bread or wine without air? Fr.Jean Mesny once elicited from a group by a series of questions, how was bread made? In summary, the labor of others planting a seed, watering it, letting the sun and the air impact it, watching it grow until harvest; the labor to harvest the wheat and grapes, work to grind the wheat and ferment the grapes, the labor of someone to bake it and serve it. The labor, the seed, the vine, the water, earth, warmth, and Air. Through these signs separately and together, Christ makes himself available to each of us.

In Scripture Jesus takes the deaf man with a speech impediment away from the crowd, puts his fingers into his ears and spitting touches his tongue. Then he looks up to heaven and groaned and said "be opened". The man's ears were opened and his speech impediment was removed. (Mark 7:37). So also Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. He put spittle on his eyes, laid his hands on him and asked: "do you see anything?" The blind man sees trees walking. Jesus lays his hands on his eyes a second time and the man saw clearly; his sight was restored. (Mark 8:22). These actions entered into the liturgical and sacramental life of the church in Baptism to this day. In the Pre-Vatican II ritual when I would baptize nine babies a Sunday, I would touch my tongue and apply the spittle to the lips and ears of the baby. Why? Spittle was seen as solidified breath, as an imparting of the Holy Spirit.

In the story of Nicodemus (John 3:7) Jesus says "Do not be afraid that I told you, 'you must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Or we could select the passage from Genesis 1 "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...a mighty wind swept over the waters" or the account in Exodus 14 when "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord swept the sea with a strong east wind throughout the night and so turned it into dry land."

The message of the Christ of faith is given to each one present by the Leader Catechist. Jesus says to you today.....

Then we all sing. We use our lungs, releasing an expiration of air with the vocal cords drawn close so as to vibrate audibly and become a medium of expression. We worship with Air.

Rev. James H. McCarthy
Director, Spred Chicago

Flynn & Grandson Braeden

Special Religious Education at the 47th Faith Formation Convocation at Bryant College on March 15, 2014. Ambassador Flynn told of how he is on a quest to best help his grandson, Braeden, who has a neurological disorder, and to find medical answers for Braeden and other families who have children with special needs. Flynn believes that healing may come from God and science. Specifically, the Catholic Church and Flynn do not believe in embryonic stem cell research, because destroying one human life to assist another violates our most basic Christian values. The Church and Flynn do support adult stem research.

Ambassador Flynn shared very interesting and poignant stories of his life. While Mayor of Boston, Mother Teresa of Calcutta visited and asked him to give her five homes in Boston. He told her he could not just give her the houses. The houses had to be purchased. He offered to buy two of the houses. She insisted that she needed all five to establish housing for mothers and their children. Flynn insisted they had to be purchased; Mother Teresa insisted that as “the Good Mayor of Boston”, he surely could do something.

At the end of their private discussion, they met the press. Mother Teresa reached the microphone and announced that “the Good Mayor of Boston” had given her five houses. He knew he could not correct her. Yes, Mother Teresa got her five houses with backyards for a large children’s playground. The houses are still there housing mothers and their children.

While in Rome, Flynn told of hosting a St. Patrick’s Day corn beef dinner to honor the Rabbi of Rome. The Rabbi when asked if he had a good time, he hesitated and said he guessed he did but was not sure. He wondered because there was laughter and crying at the same time as Flynn told stories of the Irish and even sang an Irish song about Irish dead mothers.

When some of his wife’s friends visited them in Rome, one of the women was very sad, because she had just lost a child. Pope John Paul II greeted them and went directly to that mother and offered her consoling words. Flynn asked the Pope why he had approached that particular woman. The Pope said as Christians we often see and know those in sorrow.

We thank Ambassador Flynn for his enjoyable, knowledgeable and inspirational presentation. We realize the goal of Ambassador Flynn’s stories was to inspire all to be proud of our faith and to bring Christ’s joyful message, values and love to create a better world.

During this wondrous Easter Season may our Risen Lord Bless you with an increase in faith, hope and love.

Catherine Madden Turbitt, SPRED Staff