

Christians should be guided by the wind of the Holy Spirit

‘That Christians get carried away by the wind of the Spirit’

Testimony of Fr. Ray Simpson, founder of a monastic community inspired by the Celtic spirituality

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Lindisfarne is an island north of England, with about five hundred inhabitants, a few miles from Scotland: no coincidence their colours recall the Scottish highlands. Holy Island (Lindisfarne) is known as the Cradle of Celtic spirituality. Its peculiarity is that it is connected to the mainland, terra firma, by an isthmus that makes it accessible by foot or car twice a day at low tide. On Lindisfarne Fr. Ray Simpson, a celibate Anglican priest, founded the ecumenical monastic community devoted to St. Aidan and St. Hilda, - to live and get to know Celtic Christian spirituality. With a renewed commitment to the care and preservation of Creation.

We went to Lindisfarne and there interviewed Fr. Ray. We talked also about the last encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, of interest because of new perspectives in the ecumenical and inter-religious.

ZENIT: Father Ray, tell us about the community of St. Aidan and St. Hilda ...

Fr. Ray: I am an Anglican priest, founder guardian of international Christian community of St. Aidan and St. Hilda. In this community we have Catholic members, Orthodox, Anglicans and evangelicals. We are an ecumenical community. And our rule of life tells us to live together the strengths of God in a Christian life which is separated today. So we have some members who attend

Mass who believe in the sacraments, we have some evangelical members who pay great attention to the poor and justice, we also have some Anglicans members who are now realizing how important it is to be careful of creation. These are just some of the strengths of our community ...

ZENIT: What are the key points of Celtic spirituality?

Fr. Ray: Originally, Christianity was a way of life, which then became an institution. Celtic Christians seek to establish a way of life without strictly following this institutional form.

The sun rises every day and directs us to God. And just as the sun resembles God, Celtic Christians look to the wind as the Spirit of God. Celtic Christians allow themselves to go where the wind blows, showing specifically abandonment to God's mercy.

Christianity ignored the creativity of nature. 1300 years were needed for the Catholic Church recognize the value of Celtic spirituality after the synod of Witby (in 664 at the Synod of Whitby decided to the Latin-ization of Christian England, ed).

The Celtic Church has really deep and important roots. Once Greek philosophy separated the body from the mind, so did the Church when it was dominated by clericalism. The thought comes from the heart, there is no separation between Paradise and everyday life. And this is very true of the Trinity, to be understood not as an absolute thing, but as three loves in the heart of God himself.

ZENIT: You can find similarities between Celtic monasticism and Benedictine monasticism?

Fr. Ray: Indeed there are similarities, for example, the value of hospitality. For many historians it would not have been possible to re-evangelise Europe after the Barbarians without monasticism. Celtic monasticism gave its contribution to that, although with differences to how Benedictine monasticism gave its. Despite the attention to the daily prayer, present in both experiences, continental monasticism

requires a specific stability in the monastery, Celtic culture sends monks out to walk and preach.

ZENIT: Francisco is the Pope of dialogue and attention to creation. What do you think?

Fr. Ray: Pope Francis is admired by a growing number of people. The tragedy of Christianity is that Christians themselves have forgotten to be one family in the world, because the Word convinces us that we grew up together. God gave us the way to be united Christians, but then we split up. The problem is that people do not want to recognize all we have in common, like Creation, and that is what Pope Francis is recognizing, although so far institutionally that has not changed at all. Personally, it is changing in style, and people really like that, though not all necessarily follow the Pope's advice. Certainly, within the Church of Rome, nothing has changed institutionally, except the style.

ZENIT: What are the points of contact between the encyclical Laudato Si 'of Francis and the Celtic Christian spirituality?

Fr. Ray: The Celtic Christians recognize that creation is God's and God is in the creation of which we are all part. Thus the Celtic Christians are linked to all creatures, love animals, understand that nature made us all equal. While our capitalist society leads us to exploit the weakest to increase exponentially the wealth of the richest.

In the Bible, creation dominates. In capitalism money dominates and creation is destroyed. Pope Francis is telling us what Celtic Christians have said for centuries. What we say is that in nature all men are alike. Pope Francis is expressing a thought that people wrongly believed for centuries. Namely, that the poor were dropped to their fate and the earth, with its natural resources, it is to be destroyed. We must commit ourselves to change this together.