

*Elijah came to a cave where he took shelter. Then the LORD said to him, "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will be passing by." A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and crushing rocks . . . but the LORD was not in the wind . . . not in the earthquake . . . not in the fire. After the fire there was a **tiny whispering sound . . .***

Considering what TV has to offer these days, I often take refuge in Rick Steves' travel presentations, which display so much of the rich culture of Europe. And I sit in awe of some of the great cathedral sanctuaries – especially in southern Europe – where statues of saint after saint are piled high amid cherubs - on up to a remote figure of God wreathed in clouds. And yet I wonder: can this portrayal of some heavenly summit mislead us into thinking of God as an object like any other object – like a chair or tree or Hyundai? A *distant* object? Because God by definition is no object, no created thing – but Creator, Source (in the sense of spring, fountainhead) out of which all things have surged into being.

Lifting our gaze to a remote God on high not only risks one's getting a stiff neck. It turns our thoughts away from where we might otherwise trace our Source – as Genesis says: out of the very oasis – or earth – upon which we stand. After all, when we were baptized didn't we come up out of water more so than out of the sky?

We speak of conscience often enough – defined as our "consciousness of moral goodness or blameworthiness" – a kind of interior judge – something *within* us. This inner thing can also be defined as the faculty that "enjoins good deeds" as, when a person takes a strong stand for justice, we say, "She was guided by conscience"

James Joyce imagined a wonderful way in which the Spirit, the poetry of God infiltrates our being from within or below – in his novel *Ulysses*. Leopold Bloom – a Christ-like character – rescues the novel's main character Stephen Dedalus (the future poet) from a binge and takes him home to sober him up in more ways than one – character wise. In the course of the evening Bloom goes to the sink to draw water for a cup of cocoa. "*Did it flow?*" asks the text. "*Yes.*" replies the text: "*From Roundwood Reservoir in County Wicklow of a cubic capacity of 2400 million gallons, percolating through a subterranean aqueduct of filter mains of single and double pipeage by way of Rathdown, Glen of the Downs and Callowhill to the 26 acre reservoir at Stillorgan, a distance of 22 statute miles, and thence, through a system of relieving tanks*" until it issued from the tap!

That's a good description of how the Spirit works if you lay aside the distractions of your everyday existence – and allow such Distant/Nearness to mysteriously influence your mind and heart. As John's Gospel narrates:

The [Samaritan] woman said to him, "Sir . . . you do not even have a bucket and the well is deep . . . Jesus answered . . ."whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Geoff Wood