The Lord and Giver of all life

When thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created, and Thou renewest the face of the ground.

(Psalm 104:30)

As the springtime of the year approaches, we look with eager anticipation to the sprouting of the tulip bulbs, the budding of the trees and, for most Canadians, the greening of the grass. The dormant earth comes to life again. Since we see this happening on a yearly basis, and we have seen it happening since our youth, we are prone to take these things for granted. This is the cycle of nature, isn’t it? What could be more normal, more expected?

As God’s children, however, blessed with His Word to guide us, we are to view springtime with the eyes of faith. We need to be reminded of this because our faith perspective is constantly challenged. On the one hand, there is a materialistic, mechanical understanding of nature that speaks impersonally about what is happening. On the other hand, there is a resurgent pagan spirituality that personalizes nature and speaks of “Mother Earth.” As Christians, however, we look at the world in which we live as our Father’s world where spring is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Spring should make us think of the Spirit. We frequently speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation. The words of our Lord Jesus to Nicodemus come to mind: “...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Or we think of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” As Christians, we do not really have to be reminded of that. We need reminding, however, that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and Giver of life...” (Nicene Creed) in the full sense of the word. That means He is Lord and Giver also of all physical life.

We hear this expressed in the words of Psalm 104. The Psalmist has been praising God for His marvellous work of creation and providence. It is the LORD who “causes the grass to grow for the cattle and plants for man to cultivate” (v. 14). It is He who “made the moon to mark the seasons” (v. 19). In verses 29 and 30 the author sums it all up by confessing that it is God who can take away the life’s breath of a creature, and then they die. Then he confesses in verse 30, “When thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created, and Thou renewest the face of the ground.”

Notice the work of the Spirit in the creation of life, not only in terms of animal life but also in the ability of the soil to bring forth food. We can of course follow the scientific explanation offered: about the earth orbiting the sun, and the angle of the earth catching the warming rays of the sun in the spring along with the lengthening of days causing life to sprout again. The Psalmist takes us beyond the secondary causes and shows the ultimate cause: the Spirit of God, the Lord and Giver of all life! In this, the Psalmist echoes what we learn already on the opening pages of Scripture. There we read, “…and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

As the days grow longer and warmer, as the earth begins to show signs of new life, as the flowers greet you with their bright colours, as the grass stands in need of mowing and the trees begin to bud, see these things as evidence of the Holy Spirit. As springtime follows winter, it is a reminder of that promise the LORD made to Noah that the seasons will continue, that promise sealed by the sign of the rainbow. You will not find this perspective in any science textbook. You find it only in God’s Book. As those made alive by the Spirit out of grace in Christ, be sensitive to the work of the Spirit all around you. Perhaps, as family, take the time and sing Psalm 104, giving praise to the Lord and Giver of all life!