

Isolation Radio Talk

The life-giving heartbeat of The Church

Good Morning

The Holy Spirit is the heartbeat, the life-giving power of the Christian Church. Today, you go back to the beginning of the Church; this Day of Pentecost; the birthday of the Church.

The disciples had been waiting for ten days. The old impatience was back; they are excited but confused; one of their number, Judas had committed suicide; good riddance. Now, to replace him they chose another to be a disciple. Probably they threw dice; that is not mentioned; the lot, says Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, the lot, fell on Matthias. (Incidentally, we never hear of him again.) Peter seems the most active; was he not always?

It seems they are in the waiting room of the Holy Spirit. Then, on that day, something happened, something sudden. A strong wind, banging the shutters, a great noise; they heard it in the street outside, they felt it in the room; the room seemed lit by tongues of flame. Imagination? No, not imagination. A sign then? Yes, and yes again, a sign of the new start; a new reality. Things were different now.

Thirty years later St Paul, wrote his Letter to the Romans understanding something of what had happened at Pentecost. It is a wonderful, pointless speculation, to think he was present in Jerusalem on that day. Did he think the followers of Jesus were drunk?

The coming of the Spirit was dramatic; the sudden finale to the days after the Resurrection. Jesus' presence now is the Holy Spirit. This overwhelming experience came on Paul himself; he was at pains to make the claim that he too had seen Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. He knew the 'unsearchable riches of Christ' were his; he says, they are yours too.

Jesus became real again; the earthly Jesus remains a mysterious, controversial figure in history; Pentecost says He is the Spirit, who is close to you in the present; He comes to life; in you.

I do love modern art; I don't always understand. I can look at curious drawings and painting and dismiss them because I do not understand them. It is a different matter when a guide explains what I am seeing, expands their meaning. Portraits of Christ stand on the canvas of history; so long ago; different times; different race; different culture. Transported to those times, you would be utterly bewildered. Not so today, on this Feast of Pentecost, you are able to say the Holy Spirit helps you hear the voice God for your own time, your own condition. How is that so? Well. . . .

Think of it this way. A young baby wants to communicate; sounds, at first unintelligible, are soon formed into meaningful words, learnt gradually from those around who give care and love; language is learnt; meaning is absorbed; those early words are intimate and born of love. For Jesus as for

Paul, the word *Abba* had a meaning full of understanding and of love. Jesus said that the relationship of God with all of them was the intimate word for a close, warm relationship; nothing formal. 'Abba', he said it was, *Abba*; 'daddy' might be your translation.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul says the Holy Spirit helps your weakness, your difficulty in putting deepest hopes and fears and thoughts into words. You may have known bleakness during this time of COVID-19; there is no shame whatsoever on relying on the comfort of faith at such a time; when your soul cries out; when hope is your dearest hope; that is the moment the Holy Spirit touches you most intensely.

Even after the events of the Day of Pentecost, Christians have tended to make the same mistake again and again. They have thought that they could dispense with the waiting room. It is for other people, not for you. You want to be part of the glory of the Church, but do you want to be part of its cost and its scandal. When you examine the characters of the disciples you know they were people, from a different age, yes; but people none-the-less like you; these women and the men God had empowered to be his hands, his feet, his voice in the world then, and for all the generations that followed.

The Holy Spirit says Paul will lead you; through the life the Spirit gives, wonderful things are possible; but the Day of Pentecost did not guarantee a virtuous Church. Far from it. It is a community whose members are called to be saints; by saint you do not mean someone who is perfect; you mean a sinner who keeps on trying.

On that day, the Church became a visible society. It has visible marks. It was always so from the beginning. *Baptism*, signs, seals, and admits you into the fellowship of the crucified and risen Christ. *Eucharist*, the bread and wine of Communion unites you as the Body of Christ. The tradition of *teaching* that later became the Christian Scripture feeds the mind; the *Creeeds* summarise the faith; women and men are called to practice and tell and live the Gospel.

These gifts come from Pentecost - Sacraments, Scriptures, Creeeds, Apostolic Ministry, the Priesthood of all believers. These are gifts of God to the Church of God; they enable it to witness to the truth of Christ; to transform the world; to call all people, into the body of Jesus Christ, generation after generation.

You will not allow any of that to mask scandal and division in the church; do not belittle the shame. You claim, because you know you need forgiveness and God's grace, you claim you see the glory of what might.

The Church lives for God and for the world. When it lives faithfully it draws people to faith; it tells of God and stands by the divine principles on which humanity is ordered. The life of the Church has been anything but smooth or steady; it has setbacks and advances; it tells of divine judgement and of great faith. Such an unfolding of the great love of God for you was given through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit; such an unfolding becomes vibrantly alive and with you now. Why? Because of that Day of Pentecost.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Let us pray to the one God,
Abba, Word and Spirit,
that our lives may bear witness
to our love and hope in God.

Lord Jesus, I give you my hands
to do your work.
I give you my feet
to go your way.
I give you my eyes
to see as you do.
I give you my tongue
to speak your words.
I give you my mind
that you may think in me.
I give you my spirit
that you may pray in me.
Above all, I give you my heart
that you may love in me your 'Abba',
and all humankind.
I give you my whole self
that you may grow in me,
so that it is you, Lord Jesus
who live and work and pray in me.
Amen.

[Grail Prayer]