

Pentecost

31 5 09

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
revive your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

My text this morning may be found in today's passage from Acts, 'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit' (2 v4).

Today, the Day of Pentecost, or Whit Sunday if you prefer the older designation, is neatly sandwiched between Ascension Day and Trinity Sunday. Ascension Day marks the completion of Jesus' earthly ministry; Pentecost marks the coming of the Holy Spirit and the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and ultimately to the whole world; Trinity Sunday is our annual attempt to make sense of the mystery of the nature of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So today, let us focus on the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, and how, according to Luke, he first came to the disciples in order to anoint them for their ministry as apostles, people sent out to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ

is the Son of God and that through him, the grime and dirt of our wrong-doing is washed away so that we may enjoy a real and a loving relationship with God the Father through the informing power of his Holy Spirit.

The circumstances of that day are well known. The disciples are gathered together to pray. They are in the Upper Room where they had celebrated the Last Supper, the Upper Room where a few weeks ago, frightened, they had cowered behind locked doors after the Christ's crucifixion and where the Risen Christ first appeared to many of them. And now the promise that they would not be abandoned, that they would not be left alone, is fulfilled. It is fulfilled by the sound of a rushing wind and by what appears like tongues of fire settling on the head of each disciple. And the effect of the wind and the fire is transformational as each is enabled to speak in tongues which in this instance manifests itself as an ability to speak a foreign language fluently, whether that be Greek or Latin, Egyptian or Arabic or any of the several languages with which the Jews of the Diaspora, come to Jerusalem for Shavuot, one of three pilgrim festivals in the Jewish religious calendar, would have been familiar. The crowd of largely foreign Jews is amazed at what they hear and Peter takes the opportunity to give his first sermon witnessing to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, their Messiah, and that what they are seeing is in fulfilment of what has been prophesied by their prophets such as Joel.

We are all familiar with what happened that day and the consequential growth and persecution of the faith. What I want to concentrate on, then, this morning is the difference the Holy Spirit can make in the lives of people and in order to do so, I

am going to touch on three verbs: enthuse, encourage and empower. It seems appropriate to think about him in terms of verbs because in one sense the Holy Spirit is about doing, about action. Like the wind and fire that represents his coming, he is a source of energy to act, a flow of power to do, the motivation to live truly Christian lives.

Firstly, then, to enthuse. To enthuse and the noun, enthusiasm, from which it is derived comes from the Greek ἐν θεοῦ, God in us. To enthuse is to fill with a sense of the presence of God. By the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we become aware, more aware of the existence of God, we begin to recognise his presence in the world around us, in the pattern of our lives and, most important of all, alongside us. A prime act of the Holy Spirit is to transform us from being blind and deaf and asleep to people who are awake and can hear and can see God in our lives – we are excited by the promise and the fact of Jesus' last words at the end of Matthew's gospel, 'Lo I am with you always'.

Secondly, to encourage. Encourage is the same verb in French, 'encourager', and the key word here is 'coeur', heart. Encourage is to give heart, to hearten. Encourage is to make us strong in how we feel. Encourage is to strengthen our will, to stiffen our determination, to give us the resolve to do and to be. Encouraged by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we have the heart to be disciples of Christ, to be Christians.

Thirdly, to empower. Empower is just that: to energise, to give the power necessary to act. It is no coincidence that the two images to describe the Holy

Spirit are ones of natural energy: of wind and of fire. Above all, what the Holy Spirit can give us is the capacity to keep going. It is like having a mobile phone or laptop computer whose battery never runs down, never needs recharging, because the Holy Spirit is a limitless source of free, renewable energy.

And so we may see that in one sense the Holy Spirit is the 'Verb of God' in our lives who can enthuse, encourage and empower us. But my question is, are we prepared to let him? Will we, of our own free will accord, allow the Holy Spirit to act in our lives or will we keep him at arms length and refuse his help to transform our lives? Of this I am certain that, with our consent and co-operation, his presence with us is transformational.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

St Bartholomew's Dinard

31st May, 2009

H: Sermon 20: Pentecost

