

Pentecost

23 5 10

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.

My text this morning may be found in today's passage from Acts, 'Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them and rested on each of them.' (2 v3).

John Marshall's photographs of the Confirmation are displayed in the church porch. One focuses on Edouard Xavier wearing the Bishop's mitre. According to Bishop Geoffrey, the mitre by its shape suggests what appeared to the Apostles in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost as tongues of fire. So a mitre is a visual aid to remind us of the presence with us of the Holy Spirit.

The heart of the Confirmation Service is the laying on of hands by the Bishop. Placing his outstretched hands on the head of each candidate, he says these words: 'Confirm O Lord your servant . . . with your Holy Spirit. One article of our faith is the belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives working in us, working with us as we try to grow in the faith of Christ. Last week, I spoke of the

presence of God in our lives. This week we now turn to consider the Holy Spirit as God with us.

Jesus has been present with his disciples during his earthly ministry. According to Matthew's gospel, as Jesus is about to ascend into heaven, he says these encouraging words: 'Lo I am with you always.' And they believed him. They went away full of joy in anticipation of what was to come. And what was to come occurred today: the coming of the Holy Spirit. Gathered together in the Upper Room with Mary the mother of Jesus, the disciples were amazed to hear what sounds like the wind and saw what seemed to be fire alighting on each one's head.

The two images of wind and fire suggest two aspects of the Holy Spirit which suggest his presence with us. The first, the wind, suggests the life-giving nature of the Holy Spirit. When God created Adam, he breathed life into him. In Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the Dry Bones, the breath of life animated the desiccated bodies. And here in the Upper Room, the wind is the breath of God giving new life to the disciples who were empowered to go out to witness to the truth of the good news that God had become Man in the person of his son Jesus Christ and that salvation lay in the belief that Jesus Christ was indeed their Lord and their God.

So the wind they heard may be seen as the life-giving breath of God in us. And like the wind, the tongues of fire, the flames of light, are a source of energy and life. Life dies in the cold but is revived by the growing warmth of Spring. The

tongues of fire frees the tongues of the apostles to speak, enabling them to speak the truth that they have witnessed first-hand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind. So the tongues of fire can be seen as a source of energy empowering us to live Christian lives, the flame of God alight in our hearts, encouraging us to live Christian lives.

Wind cannot be seen; but the effects of the wind can. In one sense, you can't see the presence of the Holy Spirit in someone's life but you can see the effect. Paul in Galatians talks of the nine fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The growth of such virtues in someone's life is a sure sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit with them.

Fire can be seen. A healthy fire burns bright and gives light and warmth to those near it. Likewise, a Christian fired by the presence of the Holy Spirit has the energy to live a Christian life: to give warmth and light to those they meet, to those they speak to, to those they help.

I believe in a God who is with us, Emmanuel. God the Father has made himself known to us through the Incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ. God the Father makes himself known to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So my belief and the faith of the Church is that God is indeed with us but it is still our choice whether we choose to acknowledge that presence and get to know him and let him work in and through us or whether we give him the cold shoulder, ignore him, blank him out and go our own sweet way. God loves us enough to

give us the space to love him or not in return. But be careful: getting close to God can be life-changing.

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

23rd May, 2010

H: Sermon 22: Pentecost

