



PENTECOST – YEAR B

In the name of the Father +, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate the great feast of Pentecost, the last day of Eastertide. We celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, enabling them to preach the Good News and become the Holy Church of God. Today, fifty days after Easter and the resurrection of Jesus, we rejoice, once again in the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, who is still poured out upon the Church to enable her witness and to open the hearts of men and women to receive the Gospel message.

Last week we celebrated the Ascension of the Lord, when Jesus returned, body and soul to take his rightful place at the side of his Father in heaven. In the Ascension of Jesus we rejoice that not only Jesus' godhead was taken up into heaven, but also that his humanity, with all the wounds and scars of the scourging and crucifixion are now seated at the right hand of the Father in glory, giving us the sure hope that where Christ has gone, we may follow. With two thousand years of Christian history behind us, it's easy for us to sit back and wait, after the Resurrection for the Ascension, and after the ascension for Pentecost. How different it would have been for those first disciples and for Our Lady as they sat in the locked room, pondering what had happened, and waiting anxiously, hopefully, despondently, for what was going to come.

After his resurrection, Jesus' disciples did not know what to think: take the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus as an example. The disciples were dejected, confused, afraid, their minds were reeling and they didn't know what to think or believe about the stories that their crucified friend had risen from the dead. And then, Jesus appears to them in his resurrection body: they eat with him, they touch his wounds, they talk with him and learn once again to trust the promises of God. And then, forty days after the Resurrection, just after things were going so well, Jesus is taken away from them again. How must they have felt? I imagine those feelings of loneliness, depression, despondency and fear must have been ever-present in the hearts and minds. The disciples had been slow to understand the Scriptures and Jesus' own predictions of his resurrection: were they so slow to understand what Jesus promised before his Ascension?

In the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we read that Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for what was promised: he says, 'John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' In S. Luke's Gospel's account of the Ascension, Jesus tells the disciples, 'And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with power from on high.' In our Gospel reading this morning, S. John records Jesus telling his disciples, 'When the advocate comes, whom I shall send from my Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from my Father, he will be my witness.' Notice that Jesus does not say 'If the Advocate comes', but 'When the Advocate comes.' In all of his conversations with the disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Advocate, Jesus promises that he will surely come,

and that promise of truth will lead the disciples, and those who follow them into all truth. Just as the promises of God in Scripture were fulfilled, and Jesus' promise of his rising from the dead was fulfilled, so, surely, the Holy Spirit would come, enabling, empowering, teaching, sustaining, rebuking, correcting the Church from the time of those first believers up until this day. For the gift of the Spirit that was poured out at Pentecost didn't just stop on that day: yes, the signs and wonders that the disciples performed, and the gifts that they were given to perform them, may have been for that specific time and task only, but the Holy Spirit is still as alive and active in the Church as he was when the disciples were clothed with the promised power from on high.

But, what, or who, is the Holy Spirit? How does he work in the Church today? The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity: the love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father is so abundant and strong that their reciprocal love is itself another person, the Holy Spirit. The love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father is so great that it overflows into the world, pouring out the gift of love into all creation, enabling us to share in the life of the Trinity, enabling us to be taken up in the love of God, and reflect that love which the Spirit gives. Jesus himself says that the Spirit blows wherever it wills, and we cannot see it: it is like the wind; we can only see its effects. And this is how we are able to see the work of the Spirit in the Church today. In our second reading from S. Paul's letter to the Galatians, we heard that famous list of the gifts of the Spirit: 'Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.' These are the promised gifts of the Spirit, and where they are present in the lives of believers, they enable the Church, and each Christian. To be what God truly calls them to be: these are the gifts, the attributes that will lead believers, and the Church, into all truth. Where these virtues are present, we see the work of the Spirit: where deeds of love, or charity, or kindness are done; when a person is patient, or trustful or gentle or self-controlled: there God's work is being done. These are the ways in which the Spirit works in the lives of those who believe, for the good of the Church and of society, and for the mutual up-building of the world in love. These are the gifts of the Spirit that have been poured into our hearts through baptism and the other sacraments of the Church, for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on us: we are no longer dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are no longer our own: we belong to God, for we have been bought with a price, and that is nothing less than the Blood of Jesus his Son.

The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a momentous event, for in it the life of the Trinity was fully revealed and the mission of the Church was inaugurated with power. That same Spirit who inspired the first disciples, and filled them with courage, fearlessness and hope is at work in the Church today: that same Spirit who inspired the martyrs to give their very lives for Christ is at work in you and me. To be baptised and have the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts is not something to be taken lightly or fore-granted. Scripture teaches us that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And yet, that Spirit has been given, freely, abundantly, gratuitously, and he is ours, to enable us to share in God's mission for his Church and his world, and to enable us to be the people God wants us to be.

Let us pray today that we may be people of hope; that we may trust the promises of God, and dedicate ourselves anew to his service. Let us be people of the Spirit: people whose lives are open to the work of God working through us and in us, as his servants and co-workers in the mission of the Church. Let us pray that our lives may be those which truly exhibit those gifts of the Spirit; lives of Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is the proof that God's Spirit is alive and active in our Church and in our lives: let us not be those who grieve God's Spirit. It is these virtues that have enabled Christians to witness effectively to the Gospel message throughout the centuries, and it is these virtues that need to be present in our lives and in our Church today, if our mission is to succeed. Without them, our effort is worthless. For these are the real gifts of the Spirit; these

are the real signs of a Spirit-filled Church; this is what it means to be 'Pentecostal': people who are loving, joyful, peaceful, kind, good, trustful, gentle and self-controlled. These gifts are our tools for mission; these gifts are our armoury against sin, the flesh and the devil; these gifts will bring us closer to one another and to God, and, by God's grace, bring many more men, women and children to know the power of that Holy Spirit for themselves, and lead them, and us, into all truth. Amen.