

9th June 2019 (Pentecost Sunday, Year C)

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 103(104):1,24,29-31,34; 1 Corinthians 12:3-7,12-13; John 20:19-23.

'Peace be with you.... Receive the Holy Spirit!'

The feast of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, concludes our Easter celebrations. Last week we celebrated the Ascension of Jesus to the Father and today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. These feasts celebrate a new reality in the story of the Incarnation: God become human among us.

The story of the incarnation is the story of a loving God who wants to reveal himself to us. God does this in many ways, in ways that are appropriate to the time and culture we live in. In the Old Testament God speaks to his people through the prophets; in the New Testament God speaks through his own Son in human flesh; today he continues to speak to us through the Ekklesia (Greek) – the gathering of all who believe.

A common trait in this long story of the incarnation is that it has always been God who took the initiative to make himself known; it would not have been possible for us to reach and get to know God without God showing himself to us. God has always spoken in ways that we humans could understand and respond to.

Pentecost is the next stage of this story. The Holy Spirit is himself God-with-us and God-within-us. The apostles are the first to experience the gift of the Spirit, and they go out and give witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. This marks the birth of the community of believers in Christ. The Spirit is with the apostles and is also with us, to this day. We experience the Spirit at Baptism and each time we celebrate any one of the sacraments. God continually visits us and renews us in his Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of radical change; we cannot be spirit filled people unless we are free to listen to God's word in us and move forward into new pastures. On the feast of Pentecost, the apostles are still locked up in a room, afraid of the Jews. The Spirit comes on them in what sounded like a very strong wind and what looked like flames of fire. Wind and fire are two very powerful symbols that cause lots of change in the environment.

Strong winds uproot trees, cause huge sea swells and destroy buildings; it clears the way in front of it, nothing stands in its way. Yet it is also sign of new life as it causes plants to pollinate and helps fertilise crops in fields and gardens. In the book of Genesis we are told that God blew on the first human beings, sharing his life with them. Wind, breath, Spirit and soul are all signs of God's life. In the Hebrew scriptures they are all derived from the same root-word r-h (ruh / ruwah). Do I let the Spirit clean me and bring new life within me? Am I open to this Spirit blowing God's life in me?

Similarly, fire is another very powerful element that destroys and releases new life. It clears our bush and releases nutrients into the soil, allowing new life to start. It is a source of heat and light; it shines and leads people in the dark. People gather around a fire to tell stories and share faith, its different tongues playing around together in unity are a beautiful image of our community of faith. Together we give life, light and warmth.

Pentecost is another invitation for me to open myself to this new life that the Risen Jesus brings with him. In baptism I die in Christ to rise again in him, sharing in his new life. The Holy Spirit of God within me, breathing God's life in me and enlightening me with God's light, calls me forward in faith to be light and life to the world around me.

May the Spirit of God continue to give life to our faith as individuals and as a faith-community.

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