

Day of Pentecost, (Whit Sunday) 8 June 2025

Readings: Acts 2.1-21, Psalm 104.26-36,37b*, Romans 8.14-17, John 14.8-17, [25-27]

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

A modern hymn in our hymnbook, which we often sing at the Sunday evening service, begins with the line “There is a longing in our hearts, O Lord ...”. It continues with the lines “to reveal yourself” and this opening line “There is a longing in our hearts, O Lord, to reveal yourself” is repeated in each verse, accompanied by prayer petitions for wisdom, for courage, for healing, and for wholeness, and that the Lord God be near us in weakness, in fear, in sickness, and in death. We ask these things in the knowledge that it is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Helper whom Jesus promised who will grant us these things.

In many people there is this longing of which Anne Quigley writes in her hymn I just quoted that God might make Himself known to them and that God be with them in their struggles, giving them what they are lacking, such as wisdom, courage, healing, and wholeness in their various states of being, in the rough and tumble of life.

Today we celebrate the outpouring **and** the empowering of the Holy Spirit. In the first instance, the emphasis is on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a symbol of God’s inexhaustible generosity, but can we see that with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit comes an empowering, an empowering to leave the confines of the upper room to pour out onto the crowded streets of Jerusalem during the harvest festival of Shavuot, proclaiming through Peter that the promise made through the Prophet Joel has become a reality not only for devout Jews but for people from every nation under heaven “for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”. (Acts 2.21) There is outpouring and there is empowering. There are phenomena and there is effect.

Josef Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, not loved by all, but a gifted and prolific theologian, writes in his *Introduction to Christianity*,

“The third section of the Creed does not concentrate on the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, but rather on the giving of the Holy Spirit as God’s gift to the Church in time, in the fellowship of those who believe in Christ.”

The Holy Spirit is a gift, is pure gift echoing one of my favourite leitmotifs, “God gives us what we cannot give ourselves”. To this giving nature of God, a property, we being called to open ourselves. We are often terribly closed in on ourselves by schooling, by peer pressure, by the Zeitgeist, by hurts, by disappointments, by mistaken assessments of ourselves, by handicaps, by me, me, me, etc. This being closed in on ourselves often manifesting itself in our posture, our looks, our moods, our tone of voice, but also in the choices we make like the language we use.

Just as we cannot will ourselves into being, so we cannot give ourselves new life in Christ, the peace that only Christ can give. Likewise, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Helper gives not as the world gives. And what we celebrate today as an event, no doubt puzzling but extraordinary, is true for the Church, one must admit, often in less dramatic form, but not always. It is true of the fellowship of those who believe in and call on the name of the Lord in every age, and so we have been praying, some of us, ready to be surprised.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people
and kindle in us the fire of your love.

The diagnosis of being closed in ourselves, more than we can or are willing to admit, because of upbringing, cultural or national expectations, etc. Augustine expressed in his resistance to the change needed, a resistance we are familiar with, when he wrote. “Lord, make me pure (chaste) but not yet!” Having boldness to pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and kindle in us the fire of your love,” is demanding. Why? We have so much to lose having failed to grasped what we have already been given, life, and failing to appreciate what God still wants to give us. Paul the Apostle, again not loved by all but the great theologian of the Church, writes,

“More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Philippians 3:8)

So far we have explored outpouring and empowering, but it is also through the Holy Spirit that we are given guidance and wisdom. It is God's Holy Spirit who enlivens God's word in us, giving us a wisdom that is formed in the crucible of the Bible by paying attention to Scripture and, in the first instance, being immersed in the words of the New Testament. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus says to the disciples,

"... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, [a] to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be among [b] you."
(John 14.16-17)

The Spirit abides in us and is amongst us. Where two or three are gathered in my name I am in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:19-20) God in us and God amongst us... Wow!

There is truth that we are being led into. It can be glimpsed. It can be known. It is not of this world. We move from believing to knowing. It is not 'my' truth or 'your' truth, but the truth that is grounded in God. It is a truth not from below, but from above, to use spatial imagery. It is in the Temple, it is during worship that the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6) is given a vision. It is in church, during divine worship, in the fellowship of believers, God's people, that we can and are afforded a glimpse of God's kingdom, are given a word, knowing it is of God, are given knowledge that does not originate in ourselves, but in the encounter with God through "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive." There is, as Jesus says, truth that is outside the world, not of this world It does break into the world and it can break into our lives. It is revealed. Openness is required. As in the modern hymn, "There is a longing in our hearts, O Lord, to reveal yourself".

In gradually drawing to a close, I want to address the stasis (inactivity) and the selfishness one encounters as one goes about one's life as a Christian within and without the church, the Christian household, and I do so by being reminded of another modern hymn. Again, it is a hymn we often sing at the Sunday evening service. It is by Stuart Townsend, *Holy Spirit, living breath of God*, Breathe new life into my willing soul (2005). We began with longing. We end with willing, a willingness to receive new life by opening ourselves to the operation (workings) of God.

Many long for a richer life, a more fulfilling life. This longing needs to be accompanied by willing, which we give expression to in prayer. "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and kindle in us the fire of your love", or as in the ancient hymn *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, "Come, Holy Spirit, our souls inspire and lighten with celestial fire...". The line from the hymn, *Holy Spirit, living breath of God* that came to mind as I thought about the outpouring and the empowering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, was simply "Cause Your Word to come alive in me" and especially "come alive in me", as in Holy Spirit, come alive in me. I do not only wish this for myself, but for all of us. We can theorise, write tomes, some of which are massive, but what is of first importance is that God's Holy Spirit is alive in us, is at work in us. If you are enriched, I am enriched, therewith we are mutually enriched by the grace that is at work in us.

"Come alive in me"? Why? Because, I know, we will all be enriched as already stated, and beyond measure. I could leave it there, because God is gracious and good. With God active in our lives, having come alive in us, we can face the tragedies of our lives knowing ourselves held in God. "Come alive in me"? Why? I have no desire to be turned in on myself, but like the disciples I desire to go out into the world, to be amongst God's people and to tell the works of God, as on the first Day of Pentecost. This sending includes retreating as well, but always retreating in order to go out again full of life, empowered, desiring to lead an abundant life in thankfulness to God, as we are called to do. It is part and parcel of our calling. Is this selfish? We are to celebrate life. We are to flourish in the knowledge that each moment is precious and may be our last. *Memento mori!*

We can do much of the above in our own strength, but we will be able to do much more in the strength God supplies, guided by divine wisdom, in the knowledge of divine truth and the life-giving Spirit of God. Yes, Holy Spirit come alive in me and all who are present here. Stop! Correction! It may not actually be about doing more, but it will always also be about doing. No escape clause. Sorry. In truth it may be more about learning to appreciate God and the lives we are given each and every day appreciating the small things, the kind gesture,

and the goodness we are exposed to. It is not quantitative, but rather dimensional. How did the seer put it memorably?

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, ... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21.1-5)

Cause your Spirit to come alive in us! **Amen.**

Footnotes

- a. John 14:16 Or ‘Advocate’
- b. John 14:17 Or ‘in you’