

PENTECOST SUNDAY

If any man is thirsty, let him come to me!

He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive

The Feast of Pentecost stands with both Easter and Christmas as one of the principal celebrations of our Christian faith. In each of these great feasts of the life of Our Lord, we recall that God, of His own loving initiative, brings about a transformative change in our human nature to save us and to make us capable of receiving eternal life.

At Pentecost, God poured into the hearts of believers a new and wondrous gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is not 'something', but a person who enters our lives and of whom we say in the creed, is *The Lord the giver of life*. When I think of my life and its meaning, it perhaps doesn't occur to me that I need to think of the Holy Spirit, and that to do so opens up completely new dimensions and horizons to the way we perceive ourselves.

The very essence of God is life, eternal life. The communication of life to us is very much the work of Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit the Creation came into being. God breathed life into us to make us a living being. For this reason, we think of the Spirit as the *breath of God*. It was by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit that Mary conceived Jesus Christ. At his Baptism in the Jordan river, the Holy Spirit was manifest in the form a dove. In the Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead and in the celebration of Mass, the Holy Spirit is called upon to transform the gifts of bread and wine into the wondrous presence of Christ, the Bread of Life.

We do not see the Holy Spirit. By definition the Spirit is immaterial and invisible but, at certain times, the Spirit does take a visible form such as in the form of tongues of fire at Pentecost or the form of a dove at the Lord's Baptism, so that we may better recognise the reality of his presence and working. Such is the necessity of the Holy Spirit and our dependence on him that, as St. Paul says, we could not even call God *Father* or Jesus *Lord* unless the Spirit enabled us to do so.

Such is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, that at the first Pentecost people of different languages heard the Word of God proclaimed in their own tongue, as we hear in the First Reading of Mass. One Lord, One God, One Faith are preached to the whole world and so a universal Church, the Catholic Church, comes to birth. Hence, Pentecost is also known as the Church's birthday.

Why is it the case that we as Christians do not pay sufficient attention to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity? Pentecost invites us to put the Holy Spirit in focus and to be aware of His presence for,

The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world

The Holy Spirit who is 'Gift' is also the bearer of the most prized and precious gifts of God. In the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, we hear of them in the prayer accompanying the Laying on of Hands, said by the Bishop,

Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.

St. Paul, in the *Letter to the Galatians*, contrasts the fruits of the Spirit of God at work in us with a spirit of self-indulgence that we so often give into. The spirit of self-indulgence brings forth jealousy, bad temper, quarrels, wrangling, idolatry, sexual irresponsibility and all the other works of corrupt human nature. What the Spirit of God brings is very different: love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. We must overcome those 'toxins' which disease us and prevent us from belonging to Christ.

Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit

Happy Feast of Pentecost,

Fr Anthony