

Friday (Preface to Eucharistic Prayer IV)

Father, we acknowledge your greatness. All your actions show your wisdom and love. You so loved the world that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Saviour. He was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. In fulfilment of your will he gave himself up to death; but by rising from the dead he destroyed death and restored life. And that we might no longer live for ourselves but for him, he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as his gift to those who believe, to complete his work on earth and bring us to fullness and grace.

Scripture (Ephesians 4:2-7)

With all humility and gentleness and with patience, support each other in love. Take care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one body, one Spirit just as one hope is the goal of your calling by God. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, over all and within all. On each one of us God's favour has been bestowed in whatever way Christ allotted it.

If you would like to read the notes from a discussion on the readings, please go to www.sthelenscrosby.org.uk. Click on 'Prayer' and find us under 'Thinking outside the pew'

Q1 Do we restrict the Holy Spirit?

Q2 Do you want the peace Jesus gives, or do you prefer the quiet life?

Q3 Why was forgiveness of sins top of the 'to do' list?

Q4 Can a Christian have an individual, 'me and Jesus' faith?

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Pentecost

Peace and power be with you

Our culture seems to have secularised the celebrations of the major feasts: either it makes them safe, eg reducing Christmas to being about a baby and 'it's all about family' or more or less rules them out of the weekend celebrations, eg Easter where the 'bunny' sells more cards than the Resurrection. This doesn't stop us celebrating them as religious feasts, but it perhaps becomes a problem if we try to 'infect' the secular celebrations. The compromise seems to be keep religion to the private sphere. Pentecost can't accept this barrier. This, above all feasts, does not belong in church. It is certainly right to start there: since Jesus had ascended the disciples, (the twelve, plus women and Jesus' brothers, Acts 1:13-14) had been meeting together in a room "with one heart, joined constantly in prayer". Then the Holy Spirit arrives and fills them. Whether it is Luke's dramatic version of a powerful wind from heaven and what seems like tongues of fire, or the version in John's Gospel where Jesus appears and breathes on them, saying "receive the Holy Spirit", (20:19-23), those present are transformed and must go out to tell people.

In Acts 2:1-11, Luke uses imagery which would remind the Jewish readers of the power of God appearing when Israel gathers in at Mount Sinai. Significantly, all of Israel was gathered at Sinai for the first Covenant; now, people from the ends of the earth are gathered in Jerusalem - one of the signs promised in prophecies to show that the Reign of God has begun. They are able, through the Spirit, to hear about God in their own language. This sows the seed for an important theme throughout Acts: when the missionary journeys reach different lands and speak to different religions and cultures, the Spirit will come to all people and all will be welcomed into the community of believers. This admission into the community is the meaning of the Spirit-filled disciples in John's Gospel having the power to forgive or retain sins, referring to the sin of unbelief: those who had rejected Jesus, and, a little later, pagans too, would receive the Spirit and were to be welcomed. God's intention is for all people to come to know him. In John's Gospel, the apostles receive the transformational Spirit on Ester Sunday, when they are still confused and in fear after the death of Jesus. His greeting, 'Peace be with you', is not saying 'you can relax now', nor was he promising a period of 'peace and quiet'. The peace he brings is a dynamic joy which will fill them with an inner strength and certainty even in the world which is still hostile to them. As in Acts, they do not receive the Spirit for their own benefit: it is to go out and continue the work of Jesus in building God's Kingdom.

By the time Paul writes his first Letter to the Corinthians, it is clear that what began in that room in Jerusalem has spread far and wide. He is concerned that the believers are using the Gifts of the Spirit only in worship, and focusing too much on the more dramatic gifts, as though they were a measure of a person's holiness, or using them to 'outdo' the ecstatic parts of pagan worship. Paul is clear that the Spirit is given in all sorts of ways, but given to serve according to what is needed to build the body of Christ. When we meet in our 'room' on Sunday, do we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us? When we wish each other 'peace', is it a vague good wish, or more 'may the peace of Christ disturb you', reminding each other that we are commissioned to go out, as members of the body of Christ, united to him by the Spirit. Martin Bennett

Monday (Cardinal Newman)

The condescension of the blessed Spirit is as incomprehensible as that of the Son. He has ever been the secret presence of God within creation and the voice of truth in the hearts of all rational beings, tuning them into harmony with the intimation of God's law. He is especially called the "life giving" Spirit, being the inward light of the patriarchs and prophets, the grace abiding in the Christian soul, and Lord and ruler of the Church. Therefore, let us ever praise the Father Almighty, who is the first source of all perfection, in and together with his co-equal Son and Spirit.

Scripture (Acts 2:1-8)

When Pentecost day came around, they had all met together, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind, which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and there appeared to them tongues as of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves. Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled and each one was bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. 'Surely', they said, 'All these men speaking are Galileans?'

Tuesday (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

We, too, are being driven back to first principles. Atonement and redemption, regeneration, the Holy Spirit, the love of our enemies, the cross and resurrection, life in Christ and Christian discipleship—all these things have become so problematic and so remote that we hardly dare speak of them. The day will come when people will be called again to utter the word of God with such power as will change and renew the world. It will be a new language which will horrify people, and yet overwhelm them with its power.

Scripture (Isaiah 61:1-2)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison.

Wednesday (Fr. Richard Rohr)

When you no longer expect something from life, you are for all practical purposes an atheist. When you are no longer open to do something new, you might as well hang it up. The experience of the Spirit is an undeserved, unmerited becoming, a new whole greater than the sum of all the parts. It draws us out and beyond ourselves. It is radical grace. To walk in the Spirit is to allow yourself to be grabbed by God and taken into a much larger world of meaning.

Scripture (2 Timothy 1:6-7,13-14)

That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess. God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but the spirit of power and love and self-control. Keep as your pattern the sound teaching you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. With the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, look after that thing given in trust.

Thursday (St. Teresa of Avila)

The prayer of quiet, then, is a little spark of the true love of Himself, which our Lord begins to enkindle in the soul; and his will is that the soul should understand what this love is by the joy it brings. This spark given of God, however slight it may be, causes a great crackling; it is the beginning of a great fire, which sends forth the flames of the most vehement love of God. What the soul has to do is nothing more than to be gentle and without noise. By noise I mean striving with the understanding in search of words and reflections whereby to give thanks for his grace, and gathering up the sins and imperfections to show that it does not deserve it.

Scripture (Titus 3:4-7)

When the kindness and love of God our Saviour for mankind were revealed, it was not because of anything we had done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own faithful love that he saved us through the washing by which the Holy Spirit gives us new birth and new life. For God abundantly poured out the Holy Spirit on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that by his grace we might be made right with God and come into possession of the eternal life we hope for.