

Pentecost Sunday

First reading:

The Birth of the Church
(Acts 2.1-11)

The ministry of Jesus starts with the coming of the Spirit at his Baptism, and so the ministry of the Church begins with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. There can be no witness to Jesus or to his message, no spreading of the Kingship of God, without the Spirit of Jesus. Another lesson from this parallelism is that the task of the Church and the life of the Church are the same as those of Jesus himself: to bring God's kingship to its fulfilment by bringing healing, love and joy through the message of the Risen Christ. The rushing wind and the tongues of fire are an allusion to the coming of God's Spirit in the Old Testament upon Moses and the elders. So the new message is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, breaking out beyond the borders of Judaism to include all peoples of the world. The union of all these peoples, all understanding one language in their own way, is a deliberate contrast to the scene at the Tower of Babel, when all the peoples of the world were split up by their inability to understand one another's languages. The list of unpronounceable peoples is itself a witness to the universality of the Church!

Question:

*How can the Church claim to be the Spirit at work in the world?
Mention three outstanding ways in which the Church shows Christ at work today.*

Second reading:

The Body of Christ
(1 Corinthians 12.3-7, 12-13)

The slightest glance around a church full of people is enough to show the variety within the Christian community. But it needs the hints given us by Paul to remind us that every member of that community has his or her own special gift to contribute. Mercifully, these gifts are all different. It is valuable to reflect on the natural gifts that we find all around us. It is also valuable to reflect how dull, or even intolerable, life would be if I lived with a lot of clones of myself, all with the same gifts and the same faults as me! Every one of us contributes something different and valuable in its own way, whether it is the baby squeaking as a sign of new, developing life or the older person contributing wisdom, experience and even the suffering of Christ. The other inspiring thought is that all these varied and diverse people go to make up the Body which is Christ. We all have experience of various corporate bodies, organizations and companies, but none of these other bodies makes up a person. That Person is Christ, since as Christians we all live and operate through Christ's Spirit.

Question:

Who is the most Christ-like figure for you in the present or recent past?

At first sight this is a surprising gospel reading for Pentecost, but, of course, the event of Pentecost came too late to be a subject for the gospels, and we read the account of another incident where the Risen Christ gave the Spirit to his disciples. There are two emphases in the account.

The first is peace. Christ brings peace to his disciples with the double greeting of peace, and peace is a Christian watchword. Peace was the song of the angels at Jesus' birth. Each of Paul's letters opens with a greeting of peace. The letter to the Ephesians proclaims that Christ is our peace, the reversal of all worry, strife, envy, jealousy, self-seeking ambition. 'Go in peace' is Jesus' dismissal of those he cures, and also the dismissal at the end of Mass. Peace was Jesus' bequest to his disciples after the Last Supper.

The second watchword is forgiveness, for God was always known as a God of mercy and forgiveness, as Jesus came to show by his constant approach to sinners. But the Lord's Prayer shows that if we do not ourselves forgive, we block God's forgiveness of ourselves too.

Question:

'Forgiveness is the only sure path to peace.' Does this cause any difficulties?
